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SIR ROLAND.

A ROMANCE OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

BY HAL WILLIS,

Student at Law,

AUTHOR OF "CASTLE BAYNARD."

" To the hall ! to the hall !
The banquet invites ;
There music delights,
And wine crowns with transport the valorous knights."

VOL. II.



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1827.

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SIR ROLAND.

CHAPTER I.

A LONG dreary week had lingered away, in continual disappointment to the hopes of the famished inmates of the castle, since the departure of Conrad Villiers, of whose death they remained ignorant, and from whom De Redvers still dared vainly to hope for succour, although his fainting heart sickened at his protracted delay. Notwithstanding the short allowance which had been scrupulously served out to the garrison, and the diminution occasioned by the sending forth such a considerable number with Conrad, yet

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they could not eke out the provisions to a longer period than the fifth day ; consequently for the last two days they had been entirely without food, and De Redvers read in the sullen, discontented look of every passing vassal, the dreadful omen of his approaching fate ; for Conrad was no more, and his dispersed band having communicated the critical situation in which De Redvers was placed, none of those whose hearts were really for the cause, and who would willingly have supported a successful leader, would now venture to raise and lead their forces in such a hopeless adventure, to prop the falling fortunes of a bolder partisan ; and considerately left him to weather the storm he would never have embarked in, uninfluenced by their promised co-operation.

“ By the mass ! ” said Raynard, who was on guard with Colbrande on the platform—“ I am as hollow and as languid as an unbraced drum ! ”

“ And

“ And doth the baron suppose we will live on the air, while our foes are feasting yonder ?” replied Colbrande, in a discontented tone.

“ Of a surety ’tis most provoking to one’s appetite, to see such abundance without being able to partake of it,” said Raynard. “ This morn I stood lolling, like a dead lily, over the ramparts, devouring—the pleasant sight of a hearty meal—the scraps and leavings of which would have made our garrison a feast—’till my mouth watered, and I gulphed so longingly, that I fled for fear of choking.”

“ It cannot be a good cause, Raynard, where there is nothing to feed us withal,” Colbrande continued.—“ At all events, ’twere better to die with a well-filled belly, than fight on an empty stomach.”

“ Don’t mention fighting,” said Raynard—“ By my beard, I find it difficult to mount guard—as for fighting, that is quite out of the question. Think’st thou there breathes a trumpeter in the castle

could blow a charge (though God wot he hath a belly-full of wind !) or a hand that could cut, thrust, or parry—or hurl a javelin? The Lord mend us! we are all within these walls as useless as unstrung bows!"

"And who would make resistance?" asked Colbrande. "Would not the enemy's approach be welcomed? 'Twere better to feed in chains, than starve in liberty."

"Little do they imagine what an easy conquest awaits them," said Raynard, "or how quickly would they scale our walls!—Good Lord! a lusty shout from those well-fed knaves would shake us to the centre—we should fly like chaff before the wind."

"I would that we had followed our comrades when Conrad Villiers led them away: and now where is the use of the baron's holding out?"

"Conrad Villiers knoweth our situation, and hath promised to bring us succour."

"Hath

“Hath he come?—no!—He is now out of danger, and probably thinks it impolitic to risk his life and liberty in a bad cause. Moreover, we have already looked for him long enough—We have suffered silently, but we can suffer no longer.”

“Would'st thou rebel?”

“Would'st thou starve?” retorted Colbrande.

“No!—but something may be done to better our condition.”

“Why is it not done?” demanded Colbrande.

“The baron is in hourly expectation of Conrad's arrival—He lives in hope,” replied Raynard.

“But hope will not feed, or fill our hungry stomachs. An thou canst bear the gnawings of hunger without murmuring, fast, and pray for better fare. I must seek some speedier means to satisfy the cravings of nature. My failing strength is fast forsaking me. I shall pre-

sently have no power left to help myself, and who will help me? All are helpless here!

“Comrade!” cried Raynard, with a seriousness which was the more impressive, as it was unusual in him to assume it—“Comrade! reflect—Do not, by thy rashness, light up that rebellious spirit, which lurks in every breast ready to burst forth on the slightest commotion. A few hours may bring relief. The honour of our lord is at stake. Let us not turn the swords he hath placed in our hands, against him in this hour of peril, when he places the utmost reliance on our courage and forbearance.”

“’Tis well to talk——”

“Do I not feel as keenly?” quickly responded Raynard—“Am I not equally sensible with thee to the horrors of this privation? But it is the fate of war, and I will suffer unwincingly. I do not fear death, and ’twere better to die in the execution

cution of one's duty, than fall in a rebellious insurrection."

" 'Tis nobly said," cried Colbrande, not in the tone of conviction, but with a sneer of contempt for Raynard's magnanimity. " But 'tis vain to parley with a famished wolf—words may please our ears, but cannot fill our bellies. Do as ye list; whatever betide, I am prepared; nothing can be worse than this living death."

So saying, and deaf to the honest remonstrances of Raynard, Colbrande descended from the platform, and joined a knot of his famished comrades, who were assembled in the court below, uttering their unequivocal complaints, and murmuring aloud at the miserable condition to which the obstinacy of De Redvers had reduced them.

Colbrande's bold and fearless language was received with enthusiasm. Nothing could be more calculated to win a favourable hearing, than the loud expression of their half-fearful whispers; and the better

part of the garrison were speedily gathered around him, and received his appeals, so forcibly felt by every individual of the group, with every mark of approbation.

They were soon resolved upon the mode of carrying their wishes into effect. With their feelings worked up to the highest pitch of determination, they instantly proceeded, with Colbrande at their head, to demand the keys at the hands of the constable or warder, that they might instantly liberate, and surrender themselves to the king.

De Redvers was with his family, endeavouring to cheer them, and seek support in the unfortunate dilemma in which he was placed, when the noise and commotion occasioned by the mutineers reached his ears, and he hurried out to learn the cause of what his anguished heart foreboded.

Before he could reach the court-yard, however, they had summoned the warder, who seeing such an unusual assemblage

blage with evidently a hostile bearing, met them sword in hand; and when Colbrande, their ringleader, bade him surrender the keys, accompanied by the threat of being thrown over the walls if he refused to comply with his request, the incensed warder raised his arm, and struck him down. This resolute act on the part of the warder, had the effect of immediately checking their violence: they drew back several paces, awed by the summary justice inflicted on their leader.

At the same moment De Redvers appeared, unarmed, among them, and demanded an explanation.

“Give us food—we are starving!” was pronounced in answer by a hundred tongues.

De Redvers, with a countenance pale with anxiety and want, looked around upon his suffering dependants with commiseration.—“My brave comrades!” cried he, in a voice tremulous with emotion, “I know your sufferings—I participate

in them. I cannot—do not blame your murmurs. Would that my heart's blood could satisfy your cravings! I would more willingly shed it, than throw open my castle gates to Stephen. But my wife, my children—those who are dearer to me than life itself—are dying for want. I must yield, though the tide of my feelings bear me onwards towards the gulf that threatens my destruction. Grant me but one short hour more—the sands shall not run out before I give ye food or freedom.”

Pacified with this assurance, the vassals gradually dispersed, each to his proper post. Few complained of this short protraction of their misery, and many were moved with the grief which De Redvers appeared to feel so bitterly.

Colbrande had paid the forfeit of his rashness with his life. He was the instigator and the only sufferer among the mutineers; and Raynard, though he
blamed,

blamed, could not but bewail his fate; and enormous as he considered the crime of defection and rebellion in a vassal towards his lord, he thought the circumstances palliated the offence, and that the severity of the punishment was unmerited.

“ Well, sweet my lord, what caused the outcry that drew thee from us ?” anxiously demanded De Redvers’ affectionate wife, laying the infant she was nursing on the couch, and rising to meet him.

“ Our fate is sealed, my Elgitha,” replied De Redvers, mournfully: “ there hath been a rising among the vassals—’tis happily quelled—for a time at least; but we must surrender; our friends have deserted us in the time of need; nor can we condemn these hungry wretches for struggling against the horrid death that is pressing so hard upon them. They must be freed, though their liberation bring slavery or death on me and mine.”

“ Death !” shrieked Elgitha—“ oh, no

—no—no—not death! They shall not part us—’tis too terrible even to think on so dreadful a calamity. Is not our foe a Christian, and will he have the barbarity to rob these young children—that innocent babe—of their dear father! Nay, my loved lord, do not, for mercy’s sake, forebode such evil. Stephen is a husband and a father; he can feel how dear are the ties that death would sever, and his manly heart will recoil at the bare idea of inflicting such misery.”

“But Stephen calls me traitor! that name, the bane and hate of royalty, brings the penalty of death upon the bearer.”

“Nay, by whatever name they choose to brand thee,” replied Elgitha, clinging fondly to him, “thou art still mine husband, and a father; and will not those endearing names outbalance all the weight that may attach itself to that of traitor, and all the fancied ills its bearing hath brought upon thy foe? If thy defection hath tarnished his honour or his name,

Elgitha’s

Elgitha's tears shall wash away the stain. If Stephen be deaf to thee, Elgitha's speech shall plead her husband's cause, and the innocence of these babes shall melt his heart to pity and to pardon."

"Dear, loved Elgitha!" exclaimed De Redvers, embracing her; and assuming a calmness which was a stranger to his breast, he added—"Heaven will doubtless hear thy prayer; I shall yet be spared to love and live for thee, my Elgitha."

"And my heart craves no greater bliss," replied the affectionate Elgitha.

Their eldest child, a beautiful boy, eight years of age, crept slowly towards Elgitha, and clinging to her, looked up pitifully in her face.—"Why do you cry, mother? are you hungry?" said he, artlessly believing that her grief must proceed from the same cause as his own.

This simple question aroused the feelings of the tender parents. They regarded each other with a look of silent woe; and De Redvers catching up the child in
his

his arms, imprinted a burning kiss on his fair forehead.

“Thou shalt soon have food, my poor boy,” said he, “for thou art hungry too, my Arthur.”

“But mother says there is none in the castle,” replied Arthur. “Where shall we get it?”

“Our enemy, the earl, will provide us.”

“The earl, father?” inquired Arthur, astonished; “but is he not a fierce, ugly man; and does he not want to kill us.”

“He will not harm good little children,” said Elgitha.

“Nor you, nor father?”

“No, he is a brave man, and a soldier, and will act generously towards a conquered enemy,” answered Elgitha.

In this manner they were engaged, when the door of the apartment opened. Raynard entered, and respectfully saluting the baron and his lady, announced to them that the hour had almost elapsed.

“’Tis well,” said De Redvers, with firmness;

firmness ; “ I will not fail to make good my promise. Bid the heralds attend. Caparison my horse; and send the war-der hither !”

Raynard bowed, and departed.

Elgitha watched every word, and look, and movement of her loved lord, and was silent. De Redvers paced up and down the room in a profound reverie. At last, Elgitha ventured to break the appalling silence—“ May I not know how Baldwin means to act ?” asked she, in a sweet, imploring voice, gently placing her small white hand upon his shoulder. “ Rush not unwisely into the presence of an angered foe, and rashly expose thyself to danger, and thy Elgitha to certain death, should any evil chance betide thee.”

“ I intend to offer the surrender of the castle, upon condition that Stephen will permit me and mine to depart in peace,” replied De Redvers.

“ And throw thyself——”

“ Upon his honour, fearlessly.”

“ Beware,

“Beware, Baldwyn! he is thine enemy, and may not deem it unjust or ungenerous to arrest thee, knowing that sheer necessity drives thee to this act.”

“How then would'st thou that I should conduct myself in this perilous strait?”

“Remain here.”

“Here?”

“Ay, in safety.”

“And think'st thou, Elgitha, a herald's tutored tongue hath eloquence to plead our cause?”

“His mouthing would but mar it.”

“Then how canst thou avert the necessity of my presence?”

“By taking on myself the herald's office.”

“How! thee, my Elgitha!”

“Ay! even thine own Elgitha. Dost think I fear to meet our regal foe?”

“Oh! think not on it, love—this boldness would desert thee in the awful presence of Stephen and his armed court. The very gaze of his stalwart knights would

would make thy tender heart melt away, passing thy tremulous lips in sighs; thy tongue would become mute and palsied with hurried fears."

"Hold, Baldwyn!" gently expostulated Elgitha, "the parade of arms mine eyes are wont to look upon. A wife and mother rises above a woman's weakness, when she sues for her husband's and her children's lives. My hopes are centered solely in those dearest ties; these are my little world, my life, my joy. So trust in Heaven and my efforts for a favourable reply."

"Go then, Elgitha—I will not restrain the movements of thy affection," replied De Redvers, moved by her devoted tenderness. "Go forth, and thou, who hast been my joy and happiness in prosperity, shalt now become my preserver in my adverse fortunes. Be all the saints of heaven with thee!"

The opening of the door put an end to this scene, and the warder appeared, cap
in

in hand, in respectful silence, awaiting his lord's commands.

"Is all prepared?" said De Redvers.

"All, my lord."

"Lead on ; I follow."

The weary hour had elapsed ; the trumpets sounded a parley from the walls, and Stephen and his barons were somewhat surprised, when they observed the gates of the castle thrown open, and the drawbridge lowered. Twelve vassals, bareheaded, came forth, followed by the lady Elgitha, her infant clasped to her palpitating heart, and her two little children walking beside her, holding by her garment. Twelve more of her household closed the rear.

In this simple guise, she advanced towards the royal tent, before which the astonished Stephen, surrounded by his knights and barons, in all the pride and pomp of war, awaited the arrival of this singular deputation, with a feeling of mingled curiosity and wonder.

As they approached, the vassals drew off on either side, and dropped on one knee, bending low their necks, in abject humility and reverence to the prince.

Elgitha advanced with a firm step, yet her demeanour was untinctured by the slightest air of boldness or intrusion; on the contrary, there was a winning modesty in her downcast look, that gained the favour of all who beheld her. She was habited in a garb of light grey cloth, beautifully brodered with silver; her hose were of fine worsted, of snowy whiteness; and her pantoffels, or slippers, of the like texture as her dress, displaying the same style of ornamental embroidery. The beautiful tresses of her dark brown and flowing hair, were almost concealed by a small calash, or hood, which was fastened under her chin by a jewelled clasp of Norman workmanship, and fell in small folds over her neck and shoulders.

The respectful, almost breathless silence, with which she was received, gave her confidence;

fidence ; but she saw no other object than the king ; her eyes sought no other ; and his mild and courteous bearing encouraged her to proceed. She advanced, and falling gently on one knee at his feet, would have preferred her prayer in this humble attitude ; but the king stepped forward, and raising her up, addressed her thus :—
“ Gentle dame, rise up, we pray thee. It is not meet that such exalted beauty should bend so low.”

“ Noble prince ! ’tis grief hath humbled me, and I feel the lowliness of mine estate.”

“ Then be it our pride to raise the burden that oppresseth thee. Speak, sweet gentleness, and fearlessly, the purport of this visit. Thy boon is half won already.”

“ Oh, generous prince ! my heart’s best feelings warmly thank thee. I bless the fates that hath thrown us on so merciful a conqueror. Think me not selfish when I crave mine own life and freedom.”

“ Who dare do aught to peril the one
or

or other, we will deem our enemy," gallantly replied Stephen.

"Then by one kindly act assure it," said Elgitha. "Grant the free pardon of Baldwyn de Redvers."

"De Redvers!"

"My husband!"

"A traitor!"

"And yet my husband—the fond father of these little ones."

"Oh, lady! presume not too far upon our gallantry. Life, and freedom, to thyself and babes, are freely given; but death is the traitor's meed."

"Hold!" cried Elgitha; "in mercy hold, nor crush the hopes thou hast so generously raised. Thou hast promised me life and freedom; that boon is worthless, if thy revenge cut off the source from whence my life and happiness do flow. 'Twere mockery to bid the tree flourish, and then strike the root. Oh! for a little while forget thou art a ruler, and let the gentleness of thy better nature rise above
the

the offended feelings of the prince. Remember thou art a husband and a father ; and bethink thee how fairer in the sight of Heaven thy mercy will appear—what nobler revenge thou canst inflict—what dearer satisfaction win, than giving death where thou canst dispense unbounded joy, and reap such gratitude !”

It was impossible to hear unmoved the earnest supplications of such a lovely woman, animated as she was with all the warmth of the most affectionate feeling. All who heard her plead were lost in admiration ; and when Stephen graciously granted the lady’s boon, a simultaneous shout of applause convinced the king how just they deemed his merciful resolve, and how much their hearts were inclined to favour the beautiful suitor and her cause.

With trembling steps—trembling with joy, she returned to the castle, and was received on the drawbridge by the anxious De Redvers, to whom she quickly communicated the king’s generous answer.

Pardon

Pardon was granted, but Stephen had tempered his mercy with justice and policy. De Redvers was commanded to yield the castle to the king, and forthwith to quit the kingdom, and never to return on pain of death.

CHAPTER II.
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THE severe blow which had been given to the cause by the conquest and subsequent banishment of Baldwyn de Redvers (who, with his amiable wife and family, sought shelter in the Isle of Wight), for awhile silenced the disaffected. But notwithstanding the tranquillity which reigned abroad, Stephen and his allies were well aware that the spirit of rebellion still lurked unseen, and that his enemies only waited a favourable opportunity to display their hostility. Stephen was no tyrant, yet he was conscious of being more feared than loved ; and, besides keeping the strictest guard about his person, he entertained numerous spies in all parts of the kingdom.

When he withdrew from before the  
castle

castle of Exeter, leaving therein a sufficient force to maintain the place, he retired to a small domain in Surrey, whither his queen and court followed him.

In this retreat the days passed merrily, for there the fairest ladies of England and France, and the most brave and gallant of the kingdom, sojourned, courteous in peace as they were valorous in war.

Hubert de Lacy still shone prime favourite with the king, and his son, sir William, was no less honoured in the regard of the fair Matilda; for Avis, her lively compatriot and companion, sincerely loved the knight, and the queen was resolved to push his fortunes for her favourite's sake. He was her chosen page and squire on every occasion; and she watched with pleasure the growing affection of the young comple.

Sir William saw her aim, and played the lover to admiration; yet, under this show of passion, lurked the most interested selfishness. Ambition held an abso-

lute sway in that heart, where his hypocrisy pretended love ruled triumphant; and so well did he enact his part, that even the pretty, sprightly Avis believed him all her own; so truly was he devoted to her, but only as the means whereby he might exalt himself.

It was noontide, and Stephen was enjoying a promenade in the beautiful grounds surrounding the castle, accompanied by Matilda, Hubert de Lacy, his son, the black-eyed Avis, and the artless Myriol; for since the dreadful conflagration, sir Reginald de Travers's beautiful daughter had resided wholly with the queen, at her most earnest solicitation. Indeed, who could behold without loving her?

Young and artless, she possessed every charm to fascinate the heart. Her natural grace was entirely free from, and unshackled by, that dignified formality, which too often arises from a consciousness of superior personal attractions. Her figure

gure was the very model of female beauty, of such just and rare proportion, as well accorded with the divine expression of her fair countenance, wherein bloomed the lily and the rose, blending their purest tints. Her snowy neck and forehead were richly veined with azure, while the tranquil beauty of her fair blue eyes was heaven to look upon: and when the zephyrs wantoned in the wavings of her flaxen hair, she looked so mild and angel like, that men's hearts worshipped her. Yet so unassuming was this maiden in all her loveliness, that envy could scarcely find or form a blemish.

The lively Avis loved her with the affection of a sister, for although she evidently participated with her in Matilda's favour, she experienced no actual rivalry.

They both possessed extraordinary charms, yet their beauty and their fascinations were essentially different. Avis was ever the gay, sprightly, rattling demoiselle of France, who seemed to bid defiance

to the frowns of care or sorrow. Myriol was not less gay, or light-hearted, but her joyousness assumed a more subdued character—there appeared, if we may use the term, more reflection in her mirth.

Avis would laugh, where Myriol only smiled, yet no one could gaze on the soft voluptuous beauty that beamed in her lovely eyes at that moment, without experiencing a feeling of real happiness; and those smiles were remembered, while the sparkling spirit of wit and gladness, that danced in the dark eyes of Avis, was more instantaneous, more quickly felt; but the effect was more transitory—it passed away with the passing hour; in fine, Avis commanded admiration—Myriol won it.

It were impossible that sadness could find place where these lovely ministers of mirth were present, and the little party were consequently as merry as smiles and sunshine could render them.

Having rambled for some time, the  
queen



queen selected a retired shady spot, where an artificial green mound, beneath a wide spreading oak, offered a pleasant retreat from the heat of the mid-day sun.

The king seated himself beside her, while Hubert de Lacy, sir William, and the two favourites, reclined upon the green-sward at their feet.

Avis amused herself with the gambols of a little grey squirrel, which she held by a small gold chain, fastened to a glittering collar of the same metal.—“What an impertinent little rogue it is!” said Avis, looking round at it, as it perked upon her shoulder, and put its little nose to her cheek. “Go to, Mignonette! I will not kiss thee!”

“An’ I were sir William,” said the king, “I would destroy that formidable little rival in thine affections.”

“Oh, cruel thought!” cried Avis; “I pray your grace, put not such wicked whims in his head. What! kill Migno-

nette? I would banish him my smiles for life!"

"Hearst thou that?" said the king, laughing. "There's a threat! Take heed how thou dost offend against this prime favourite. Henceforth stuff thy pouches with cob-nuts, and thy cap with filberds. Thine only hope for favour in this damsel's eyes, is to purvey for thy pet-rival. Be diligent—a surfeit perchance may free thee from the compulsory office."

"Oh, worse and worse!" exclaimed Avis, hugging her little favourite. "By St. Adèle, thou wouldst teach the knight rebellion."

"We will impeach his grace for a conspiracy," said Matilda.

"And if Mignonette should die suddenly," added Avis——

"Thou wilt blame his rival," interrupted Stephen. "He will now bear the odium and punishment of the crime, even if he be innocent. But thou wilt not be



so cruel? Shall not his banishment be of shorter duration than his life?"

"It cannot possibly be for a less period," replied Avis, "even were I inclined to be merciful."

"And wherefore not?" demanded the king.

"Why, as a true knight," replied the merry girl, "how could he survive such a sentence? He must, of course, expire at my feet the moment the unalterable decree was pronounced!"

"How pathetic!" said Matilda, joining in the laugh which followed this sally.

"Methinks, Myriol would not act so sternly? Wouldst thou?" asked the king, addressing the lady.

"I cannot judge, your grace. Were I placed in the same situation, perchance I should act so too, being influenced by the same feelings," replied Myriol, blushing.

"And can cruelty then be the companion of true love?" asked sir William.

"I should think not," replied Myriol;

“and therefore he that truly loved would never deserve such a sentence.”

“Most justly answered, sweetheart!” cried the king, pleased with the pertinence of her remark. “Now would I give this signet,” displaying the splendid jewel he wore on the forefinger of his right hand, “to behold the knight of thy choice. He must be, of course, a most perfect knight, without fear and without reproach—brave, tall, handsome, and perchance of a fair favour, with speech so sooth, that it were as mellifluous as the music of the rivulet, flowing through banks of sweet-scented flowerets.”

“In very truth,” replied Myriol, smiling good-humouredly, “your grace hath right well designed the portrait; but where on this earth shall I find the original?”

“What, sweet one!” said the king, “and hast thou bloomed seventeen summers unwooded and unwon? Hath no gay cavalier whispered the tale of love in thine ear?”

“Oh, no, never, indeed! your grace,”  
answered

answered Myriol. "I have scarcely stepped above the state of childhood yet, and my heart hath owned no other knight than my dear father. In sooth, I saw but few knights in my father's halls, and they were all hardy men, whose everlasting theme was war, and the relation of deeds of noble daring, wherein they had engaged: and yet I loved to hear them talk of battles, for my loved father was often the hero of the tale; and I learnt of many valorous feats he had achieved, that his own tongue never told."

"And did they never talk of love?" asked the lively Avis.

"Never; nor did mine ear seek such language: indeed, it would have been strange and incomprehensible to me. I had not a heart to sympathize with such strains. A tale of wonder was an agreeable recreation to my fancy."

"St. Adèle!" exclaimed Avis, "what strange knights these must have been! I should have faded away in a month, with-

out the incense of gallantry. A true knight should bear a lance in one hand, and a lute in the other; be as witty in peace, as he is valorous in war; and when he casts his buckler and his mail, so artfully entwine the language of love and war, that swords and lances may appear wreathed with flowers. But these were proper samples of your thorough-bred blunt English knights, who fight and eat, drink and sleep, in their arms, carving their venison and hog's-flesh with their swords on their bucklers, and drinking their mead and malvoisie out of their own bacinets! Defend me from such ungainly barbarians! whose hearts, like their bodies, are steeled and impenetrable, being as little moved by a woman's smile as her frown.

“Now, by the rood! my sweet censorious demoiselle, thou dost judge them most unfairly. There are as true and gallant hearts beneath these rude exteriors, as ever beat for love or glory.”

“Yet

“ Yet are they as rough and unpolished as yon oak !”

“ And as firm,” replied Myriol; “ and I have found them kind, though not complimentary—respectful, if not gallant—and——”

“ Heyday !” exclaimed Avis, with an expression of mock surprise. “ Now, by my troth ! would I wage my jewelled girdle, that this blushing blonde hath fixed her heart upon one of these same ‘ kind, respectful ’ knights ! But,” added she, laughing, “ they never talked of love ! *Fi donc !*”

“ Nay, never to me !” replied Myriol.

“ Then, by St. Adèle,” said Avis, “ their eyes were blinded, and their hearts were stone.”

“ Thou art a merry demoiselle, Avis,” replied Myriol, “ and would fain make me believe that blue eyes have the witchery of black ones.”

“ And prithee, saith not the song so ?” said Matilda: “ and songs and saws al-

ways speak the truth. Avis, warble us that little ditty.—Sir William, where is thy lute?”

“So please thee, madame, I have it not,” replied sir William; “but I will fly and quickly bring it hither, if thou think’st its simple strains will not mar the sweet melody of Avis’s voice!”

“Certes would it!” said Avis, laughing. “Go, play to the nightingale, thou vain minstrel! List, while I silence the carolling of these birds!” And then, with the most enchanting vivacity, she sang the following words:

“Black eyes beam bright,  
As stars by night,  
And killing, conquering glances dart,  
To pierce the heart,  
And fill the soul with passion’s smart!

While blue eyes bright  
As morning light,  
Such pleasing tenderness impart,  
As wins the heart,  
And makes the pang a pleasing smart.

Yet



Yet both are bright,  
And knights delight  
To flutter in their winning gaze,  
Or end their days  
Beneath the sunshine of their rays !”

“ Warbled like a pert linnet !” exclaimed the king.

“ There now,” said Avis, addressing her companion—“ thou seest, Myriol, blue eyes may hope: I chanted that madrigal expressly to encourage thee.”

“ Gramercy !” replied Myriol: “ under the tuition of so apt a mistress, I shall doubtless become——”

“ As cruel and tyrannical a coquette as herself,” said the king.

After this pleasant fashion they conversed together, whiling away the time in witty repartee and singing, in which Myriol played no subordinate part; for although she possessed not the wit of Avis, she failed not to excite the warmest admiration by her infinite delicacy: and her natural and agreeable good humour was happily contrasted



trasted with the satirical wit of her more vivacious companion, who indiscriminately threw her shafts at all around her. Nor was the refined and polished gallantry of sir William slumbering, or slow in paying her those little complimentary attentions, without which "incense" (the giddy girl affirmed) her very soul and spirit would evaporate into thin-thin air." Seasoned as the converse was by the elegant and playful remarks of Matilda, and the no less entertaining wit and affable manners of the king, it could not fail to prove otherwise than most delectable.

All the courtesy of Hubert de Lacy too, was called into action, not only to fit the passing humour of his royal patron, but the beauty and simplicity of Myriol inspired even his selfish heart with a something more than mere admiration, that made him feel emulous to shine; and whenever he addressed her, it was with all that winning grace of speech, and ease of manner, which he had cultivated with  
such

such eminent success, that he really claimed more attention from Myriol than his less unaffected son, who appeared even in her eyes (notwithstanding she regarded him as the suitor of her lovely friend) to conceal beneath the outward show of gallantry and devotedness, a vast deal of vanity and self-conceit. The tranquillity of the circle was however interrupted on the sudden by the loud voices of several men, evidently pitched in the sharp key of anger and expostulation.

CHAPTER III.  
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“ St. Adèle defend us !” exclaimed Avis, drawing close to the queen’s side, the lively expression of her playful features somewhat contracted by the sudden alarm. “ I hope there is no danger. Let us away, madam !”

“ Nay, stir not !” said the king, with the utmost apparent composure, while at the same time his left hand almost unconsciously pressed the hilt of his sword. “ There is no danger—if there be, by running thou may’st meet it.”

Myriol spoke neither her fears nor her doubts at the outcry, but the bloom faded from her fair cheek, as she leaned tremblingly on the stalwart arm of Hubert de Lacy with one hand, and grasped the queen’s with the other.

Sir

Sir William de Lacy had leaped from the greensward on the first alarm, and bounded towards the spot where the discordant voices and the sound of staves arose, breaking so inopportunately on their harmony. A minute scarcely elapsed before the disturbance was quelled, and the young knight ran back to allay the fearful terrors of the queen and her damsels. —“All’s well!” cried he.

“Well!” repeated the king in an angry tone; “what unruly brawlers are they that dare disturb us with such unseemly riot?”

“Two strangers—varlets, so please your grace,” replied sir William, “who have trespassed here (with what intent God knows), and being repulsed by the verderors, who thought fit to chastise them for their intrusion, they have dared to resent their blows.”

“What manner of men be they?” inquired the curious Avis. “By my life, sir William, they made my throbbing heart

heart to die within me! although there is none who can boast more bravery than I when the danger's—at a distance."

"The verderors lead them hither," said sir William, "to know your grace's pleasure."

"We'll see them, and we'll hear them."

"The one is a straight-limbed, active youth," continued sir William; "the other, a dark, forbidding-looking barbarian—a most unmeet companion for his fellow."

"These are dangerous times," said Hubert de Lacy; "they may be spies. We'll press them closely."

"See, they come," cried Myriol.

"What a wild-looking man! a barbarian indeed! what a nut-brown skin the thrall hath!" said Matilda, as the prisoners approached; "they have done right well to bind his arms."

"How he rolls round his huge white eyes!" said Avis; "he looks as if he would devour the verderors an he could
seize

seize them. I trust they'll hold him fast."

"The other swain looks more gentle," said Hubert de Lacy; "he hath a bold bearing."

"And not ignoble either," added the king; "methinks he would better suit a better garb."

"Trust me, your grace, 'tis some disguise," whispered sir William; "mark with what an air he steps!"

"An easy gait, that would not disgrace a courtier," said the king, who appeared more prejudiced in his favour than against him.

Six verderors, in the king's livery, girded with short swords, and bearing long staves, tipped with iron, led the culprits forward.

"What make ye here?" demanded the king.

"Chance led me hither, your grace," replied the prisoner, respectfully bending to the king. "I knew not that I trespassed on royal grounds, or I would have
quickly

quickly retraced my way. But these verderors accosted me more rudely, I ween, than their office allows; not with words or remonstrances, but with such sharp and sudden blows, that mine ire was kindled, and, ere I thought how much I was offending, I followed their example; when having returned the unsought favours they so lavishly bestowed, my tongue found utterance, and while I kept them playing at a staff's length, parleyed with them, demanding the cause of such unwarrantable salutation; but they found assistance before they found their tongues, and six to one being an ugly odds, they would probably have struck me down, had it not been for the timely succour of this brave carl."

"Thou should'st at least have respected the king's livery," said Hubert de Lacy.

"I do respect my king, and all who bear his livery too; but these verderors have forgotten themselves, and o'erstepped the mild authority entrusted to their clownish

clownish hands, using force and violence, where one word—one single word, would have better served their purpose, and saved their nonces. An the peace be broken, these are the offenders, not I, nor this poor witless wight, who yet hath wit enough to know right from wrong, and strength and willingness always to strike in a just cause.”

“ This is a plain defence,” answered the king, “ and in seeming, honest.—Verderors, speaks this man the truth?”

“ We struck him, your grace.”

“ Before ye warned him?”

“ Ay, your grace; we did not esteem it needful to parley with a thrall.”

“ A thrall!” murmured he to whom this epithet was directed, and his lip curled in scorn, as his better judgment seemed to repress his rising indignation.

The reply of the verderors, however, only tended to strengthen his defence, and the king was convinced that his officious
vassals

vassals had been the aggressors.—“ Who art thou ?” demanded the king.

“ A free man ; I serve in the ranks of the baron D'Estraville.”

“ Thy name ?”

“ Roland.”

Here the king whispered something apart to Hubert de Lacy and the ladies, which was evidently respecting Roland, to whom their most earnest regards were immediately directed, with an expression of the greatest interest, and in the cheering and intelligent glances of the ladies, he speedily read a favourable omen ; but he could not possibly conjecture the cause of this sudden change, and the inexplicable expression of surprise which dropped from their lips —“ Is it possible ?” —“ Brave youth !” —“ How wonderful !” &c. &c. when the king again addressed him, with a countenance beaming with kindness and encouragement, in lieu of the stern severity which had before contracted

tracted his lowering brow.—“ Wast thou at Exeter?”

“ I fought there, your grace.”

“ Mounted?”

“ No; on foot.”

“ And yet, methinks we met.”

“ I, your grace! so humble a subject dare not flatter himself your grace would have deigned to notice one whose only fortune is in this good blade.”

“ Thy courage raised thee to the level of the noblest knights in the field; recal that day when Conrad Villiers was repulsed, and say, didst thou not bestride a destrier?”

“ Hah! I do remember—I caught the frightened animal as he galloped o’er the field without his rider; but ’twas not for long I held him. I saw an armed chief unhorsed, and combatting ’midst a crowd of cowardly traitors: never did mine eyes witness such undaunted valour—his blows were mighty; but he was contending against such disadvantages, that I yielded
my

my steed to him who had best right to it."

"Yielded!" cried the king, in nowise displeased by the ingenuous manner in which Roland so unwittingly flattered him on the display of his courage, "thou dost forget, Roland, in the praise of that chief, that it was thy dauntless courage rescued him."

"Hah!" exclaimed Roland, surprised at the king's knowledge of the affair, "your grace then knows the chief? And did he mark the deed?"

"He did, and he now stands before thee."

"My sovereign!" exclaimed Roland, and he bent his knee as the king advanced towards him.

"Unbind this brave youth!" said the king, addressing the trembling verderors, who began to feel rather alarmed for the unwise part they had acted in this affair; "it is not meet that he who saved my life should be in bondage. Roland, we owe thee much. Ere this we would gladly have
have

have encountered thee, and spoke our thanks; but scarcely had we time to mark thy garb sufficient for description, and in the field, where so many thousands were displayed, and one so resembling the other, that search were hopeless; but time hath not had power to diminish our gratitude, or obliterate the memory of thy courage; henceforth thou shalt become one of our noble knights, and well worthy art thou of that distinguished title, which thou hast so nobly won." Hereupon, drawing his sword, the king, to the no small astonishment of De Lacy and his son, but to the infinite pleasure of the ladies, who were already delighted with Roland's frank and manly bearing, dubbed him knight, pronouncing these words:—"In the name of God, and of the holy and blessed St. Michael, we make thee knight. Be hardy, brave, and loyal!" And then addressing Myriol—"Let thy fair hands, sweet damsel, honour this young knight by girding on his sword!"

Myriol blushed deeply, while with trembling hands and downcast eyes, she obeyed the king, and performed the task.

“Thrice honoured is the knight in the receiving these favours from a damsel so passing fair.”

“That glaive must needs be invincible which is girded by beauty and virtue, and ever in their cause shall it be wielded. I have a heart that can appreciate these undeserved honours,” said Roland, and arising with unassuming grace, he made his obeisance to the whole party.

“In good sooth,” said the queen, “we have forgotten yon carl; he fought in the cause of our young knight; unbind him—his hasty spirit frets in those vile cords. Prithee, sir Roland, dost thou know him? He hath a wild ferocious look.”

“His looks do cruelly belie him, madame; he is a simple, honest soul, harmless to all who offer him no harm, but vindictive when molested; he feels acutely, and
hath

hath a noble heart; his head, I fear me, wanders strangely at times; I have seen him sit for hours, and gaze upon the moon, communing with himself: they call him Gervase, but more commonly the Black Boy."

The verderors having unbound Gervase, drew back apparently in terror; while he, clutching the cords, cast them beneath his feet, and trampled upon them; and then throwing round his arms in the joy of freedom, burst into a loud laugh, so wild and sudden, that Avis, who watched his motions with a feeling of awful apprehension, was so startled, that she let fall her pet squirrel, which, no less pleased than Gervase at being liberated, instantly ran up the oak under which they were standing, and began to leap nimbly from bough to bough.—“ Oh, *mon Mignonette!*” exclaimed she. “ Sir William, my squirrel hath fled—I shall lose him—oh run—pursue him !”

The verderors attempted to catch the
D 2 favourite;

favourite; but their exertions only alarmed the little animal, and made him skip faster along.

Gervase saw and laughed at their clumsy, ineffectual efforts.—“ The brachs may bark at the birds, but they fly above them !” said he.

“ Fear not to lose thy favourite, fair lady,” said sir Roland ; “ here stands one who can entwine those trees, and fly along their bending branches like the coiling serpent. Gervase,” continued he, slapping him on the shoulder, “ go—shew these knaves what thou canst do ! bring that little squirrel hither, and these beautiful ladies will greet ye with kind words.”

“ The voice of the nightingale is a charm to the eagle ; look, how he’ll soar above these hawks !” replied the Black Boy, proudly ; and bounding lightly forward, he soon reached the branches of the tree where the squirrel was sitting, and creeping noiselessly among the thick foliage, he concealed himself from the little panting animal,

animal, and for awhile even from those who were anxiously looking up to witness his movements, when, quick as an arrow, he suddenly darted along the branch, and caught the squirrel in his right hand, while he supported himself on the bending bough with his left, clinging firmly with his feet.

“Right cleverly done!” exclaimed the king. “We’ll give the knave a *mark* for his expertness.”

In an instant the agile Gervase was beside Avis, who looked upon his fine, muscular, sun-burnt form, and expressive face, with a far different feeling from what she had at first regarded him, when he was writhing under the influence of ungovernable passion, and his dark features contorted with all the bitterness of rage. So much had his alertness, in regaining her favourite, found favour in her eyes, and she received the truant squirrel with such pretty thanks, accompanied with a smile so fascinating, that Gervase’s wan-

dering eyes were for a moment fixed in ardent gaze upon her, while his half-open mouth exhibited a true picture of simple wonderment.

“Thine hands have been sorely wounded,” said Myriol to Gervase, for he still held them open and extended, in the attitude in which he had delivered the squirrel.

He made no reply ; but turning his eyes towards the fair speaker, his penetrating look made her recoil, and he suddenly exclaimed—“ This is the dove ! the meek-eyed dove ! ”

“ What means he ? ” demanded the king of sir Roland.

“ He alludes, your grace, to a circumstance which occurred during the fire in the city of London. Those wounds in his hands were received in the rescue of a young damsel. He mistakes——”

“ Nay, sir Roland,” replied Myriol, “ I am the same.”

“ In sooth ? ” said sir Roland, amazed
at

at this discovery, and recalling to mind the part he had enacted in that affair, felt at that moment, that to have rescued so much loveliness, was in verity a deed worthy the adventure of a dozen lives.

“Ay, this is indeed the dove — the meek-eyed dove,” replied the king — “We have heard this tale rehearsed before. And is this the knave? We have in truth been fortunate to-day in this encounter, and that which only gave us trouble in the outset, hath miraculously brought forth most marvellous good discoveries.”

“I believe, sir Roland,” said Myriol, timidly, “I can readily divine the name of the Black Boy’s companion on that occasion.”

Sir Roland bowed.

“And art thou he?” said Stephen.

“I had the good fortune to be with him,” modestly replied the knight.

“Why thou wast surely born a hero,” said Matilda. “Thy gallantry and courage have rightly won thy knighthood :

'tis no more than the meed of such adventure."

Again sir Roland bowed confused, overwhelmed with the just praises which were so lavishly bestowed upon him, while his proud heart swelled with delight and gratitude towards the young king and his amiable consort.

As for Gervase, he stood musing with his arms a-kimbo, quite abstracted, although his eyes were still fixed on Myriol—"the meek-eyed dove." Her beauty seemed to have charmed his soul, and transfixed him to the spot.

CHAPTER IV.
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THE king was so engrossed by his admiration and gratitude towards sir Roland, whom he regarded as an ornament to the honourable order he had bestowed, that Gervase and his deserts were almost forgotten. Fortunately however the Black Boy was not an object to feel this neglect. But his attention was again called to him by the queen, who interrupted a gracious colloquy in which he was engaged with sir Roland, and to which the baron and his son, as acknowledged favourites, listened with an interest, not entirely free from a partial feeling of envy, which the king's evident pleasure at sir Roland's ingenuous frankness and candour excited in their breasts, so tenacious were they of any rivalry. But not even their wit, or their sar-



casm, which they endeavoured to clothe with all the smiling semblance of good-humour, could abash the young knight, who received their pretended badinage with so much skill, that they plainly discovered, that in their attempts to confuse, they were foiled, and that their wit only served to shew off sir Roland to greater advantage; for although nothing but their court breeding could excuse the impertinence of their continual interruption, sir Roland still regarded them as nobles, who shone in the sunshine of royal favour, and therefore couched his replies with respect, but firmness.

“ See! what a noble statue he forms !” said the queen, tapping the king playfully on the shoulder, to direct his attention to Gervase. “ What grace is there in that unstudied attitude! Myriol hath enchanted him, methinks. Sir William, beware! look to thy lady-love; she already begins to think the Black Boy not quite such a barbarian as she at first imagined.



gined. He hath won her favour by his expertness in regaining her truant squirrel."

"Sweet, my lady!" said Avis, laughing, "bid sir Roland animate this Gervase, or Myriol will be consumed in the beams of his eyes."

"Ay, bring the brave fellow hither!" said the king. "This bourse shall be his."

Sir Roland approached him, and taking him by the arm—"Gervase!" said he—"Gervase! arouse thee, man."

"What!" cried Gervase, turning towards him with a wandering, unmeaning stare.

"Art thou awake?" demanded sir Roland.

"Awake! awake!" repeated Gervase; "is it nightfall? Yes, yes, and these are bright stars shining around us!" pointing to the queen and her ladies.

"In sooth now," cried Avis, "these are fair words. He hath inspiration enough for a minstrel; there is poesy in his mind."

“Gervase,” said the king, addressing him, and presenting him with a small bourse, “accept this trifling reward for thy skill.”

“And permit me, your grace, to add this—as a token of my gratitude for his services,” said Myriol; at the same time she drew a small poignard from her girdle, and placed it in the hand of Gervase, whose eyes glistened with pleasure as he grasped the gift, unconsciously letting fall the bourse the king had given him.

This disrespectful and ungracious reception of his munificence troubled sir Roland, who was fearful Stephen might take offence at his behaviour, and picking it up, he placed it again in the hand of Gervase.

“’Tis the king of England bestows this,” said he; “bend thy knee, and thank him.”

“The king!” cried Gervase; “and is he not a man?”

“Ay, truly—a brave man and good,”  
replied

replied sir Roland, chagrined at his apathy.

“Then will I not bend my knee,” boldly answered Gervase. “I never bend but to the moon! She is my mistress; and when she shines, I feel her beams, and delight in the brightness of her smiles. She bathes my burning forehead in her light, and it is cooler than the clearest stream.”

“But, good Gervase,” said Myriol, persuasively, “he is thy sovereign—thy prince—and thou owest him thine allegiance. He is a warrior before whom the greatest chiefs bow.”

“Let them bow!” replied Gervase—adding in a gentler tone, “the murmuring of the dove is sweet, but her breath cannot bend the oak!”

Stephen made a sign to them not to urge him further, intimating to them, that it was his pleasure to listen in silence to the strange, but not insignificant, language of the Black Boy.

“Wherefore should I bow before him?

For

For this silver?—I cannot eat it!—'Take it again. This knife is far more worth," said he, holding up the dagger Myriol had bestowed on him; then continued his speech, more in the tone and manner of a soliloquy, than especially addressed to any individual of the party.—"A king!—a man!—can he outstrip the buck of the forest—in the chace? Can he dive and swim like the fish in the stream? Can he climb and cling to the trees like a serpent? Can he gaze, like an eagle, on the sun, and be not dazzled with the brightness of its fire? This can I do! and I yield to no man!—My house is in the woods and the hills—my food and my arms grow there; and I am as free as the birds that carol me to sleep, or wake me with their song!"

"And so shalt thou remain," said the king.—"Go whither thou wilt—wander where thy fancy leads thee—no hand shall harm thee."

"Not while mine own can wield a club, or hurl a stone!" quickly replied Gervase,  
not

not exactly comprehending the kindness of the king's meaning. "The marks of my staff are yet red upon the carcasses of those cowardly knaves!" added he, pointing to the verderors, who were looking on at a most respectful distance.

"So please your grace," said sir Roland, "his words are bold as are his actions; but he means not to offend. His heart is true. In truth, I never knew him do wrong to any man. Even in his anger, he is just; but, wild and uncultivated, he delivers his unconnected thoughts abruptly; whether their truth offend or no—he cares not. He labours under a dreadful malady, which oft obscures his reason; and yet sometimes the shrewdness of his speech astonishes, while at others, I have known him unable to answer the simplest question. In his behalf, I pray your grace to look with mildness on the rudeness of his speech, and the rather blame the malady than the man."

"Nay, we cannot take offence," replied  
Stephen;

Stephen; “ though truth be not always most agreeable to our ears, there is a charm in the wild flow of his untutored language that is far from displeasing. ’Twere pity so noble a creature should be so abject. Could we not better his condition?”

“ In nought, your grace,” replied sir Roland; “ nay, I verily believe that in the free enjoyment of his liberty, he finds more pleasure than honour or riches have power to bestow. The breath of heaven is sweeter than perfume to his nostrils; while beneath the entwining branches of the shady forest, he finds a shelter more agreeable to his choice than the carved and gilded roofs of a palace. He is nature’s child, and nature he loves with the most filial and devoted fondness.”

“ We mark his wayward humour,” said the king, “ so let him freely seek the way wherein he best shall please himself, and find most happiness. The freedom of his speech and manners please us much. ’Tis pity he hath not more rationality in his composition ;



composition; he would make a brave and fearless warrior. List—he speaks again.”

During the time the king was making these remarks to sir Roland, Myriol had won Gervase’s attention; and she and Avis, who still regarded him with some little apprehension, had entered into conversation with him.

“This knife shall be my companion, my friend in need,” said Gervase; “but it shall be lightning to the hearts of mine enemies!”

“Use it with courage, and in a just cause,” said Myriol, “that I may never regret placing such a weapon in thine hands.”

“Thine eye nor thine heart shall never be grieved,” replied Gervase—“mine should rather bleed than see thee weep tears of sorrow. Grief is a blight on the rose of beauty—flourish in peace and in joy.”

“And wilt thou not see us again—dost thou go for ever?” asked Avis.

“I never

“ I never forget the green spots where I have slept—nor the sunny places where I have basked in the noontide,” replied Gervase; “ where I have found pleasure, there I seek it.”

“ Come hither when thou wilt,” said Myriol, “ none shall molest thee.”

Gervase laughed in scorn.—“ The sparrows do not chase the hawk, but the hawk the sparrows !”

“ But when wilt thou return ?” said Avis.

“ Anon—anon,” replied he ; “ when the moon rises over the hills, my shadow shall be upon thy path. I go,” said he ; and then ruminating for a few moments, he looked kindly on Myriol, adding—“ Like the pebble cast in the stream, I shall be seen no more, and be forgotten !”

“ We—I can never forget thee,” said Myriol—“ never !”

“ Never ! never !” repeated Gervase ; “ then when I look on the moon, I’ll think on the meek-eyed dove—ay, and I’ll

I'll catch thee a young fawn, and he shall eat from thy soft hand; for thy gentleness drives away fear, and teacheth all hearts to confide in thee. I'll bring thee a fawn." And wholly engrossed by this idea, he turned away, without taking further notice, and his quick steps soon carried him beyond the gaze of the party, who watched his motions in wonder and silence.

"Poor fellow!" said Myriol, sighing.

"And art thou too reconciled to the barbarian?" asked the queen, of Avis.

"Why truly, madame, I must confess, the wit of this witless wight, as they call him, hath strangely altered my opinion, and obliterated the first false impression his rude appearance made upon me. Heart could not wish a likelier squire for a lady's train, an' he could keep in the same gracious mood."

"Alas!" said sir Roland, "that is not possible. His mistress, the moon, is not more changeable. I have seen him in his fits of melancholy, weep like a child, and  
again

again play such merry antics, that would affright those who knew him not. Yet an infant might lead him, for he is full of tenderness, and ever ready to shield the weak and the oppressed."

The king having signified his pleasure to return, and graciously bidden sir Roland follow, that he might partake of the banquet which was prepared in the castle for their entertainment, the little party quitted the park, highly gratified with the curious adventures which had transpired, Stephen pleased at the opportunity of evincing his gratitude and his admiration of the chivalrous spirit of the gallant sir Roland, and that frank and generous youth no less delighted with the new honours which his sovereign had conferred upon him.

Matilda, who had before heard of his brave conduct in the rescue of her royal partner, felt equally rejoiced at the fortunate occurrences which had so curiously thrown him into observation; and Avis  
slily

sily whispered to Myriol, that the new-made knight "was of the right stuff to make a most finished gallant, having a fine figure, a handsome face, a ready wit, and withal of a most frank and ingenuous nature."

While the baron de Lacy and his son were only apprehensive lest the young knight should rob them of a portion of their royal master's favour, so strongly did sir Roland appear to interest him.

CHAPTER V.  
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IT were an impossible task—a vain attempt, for any pen to describe the various and pleasing emotions which filled the breast of sir Roland. He was ever brave and foremost in the field; and sometimes in those visionary moments of castle-building which fancy loves so fondly to indulge in, but which time so rarely realizes, he had dared to hope that one day he might attain to the honourable degree of knighthood. A dauntless courage and a hardy frame nature had bestowed; but on Fortune's uncertain favour depended the consummation of his hopes. In an unexpected moment his courage had won her smiles, and he found himself suddenly raised to that proud height which he had contemplated as the pinnacle

nacle of glory—the reward of valour, and could only hope to gain, by a long and arduous career in the service of the power under whose victorious banner he fought. The happy realization of his gay dreams, so miraculously brought about, overwhelmed him with unutterable joy; he seemed to tread on air, his spirits were so buoyant; the sun shone more brightly to his eyes—every bird sang sweeter to his ear; and the fresh glow of pleasure spread over his handsome countenance, rendering him still more agreeable in the eyes of the queen and the ladies; for notwithstanding the undoubted truth of that wise old saw—“ Handsome he that handsome does,” personal charms still have a vast influence over the affections of the heart, and is ever a passport to a lady’s favour; for with the softer sex first impressions are proverbially strong; and when the actions and the persons are alike handsome, the conjoint beauties are irresistible.

To

To become a knight had been sir Roland's ambition; but how to support that title with proper dignity, had never entered his head. He possessed neither lands nor money, nor had any, the least, prospect of obtaining sufficient to purchase a suit of mail; and fortunately (even now that his wish was fulfilled) the thought of such necessary provision did not arise to embitter his felicity with the alloy of such serious and worldly reflections; nor did they occur to him, till the generosity of Stephen had effectually put it out of their power to disturb him. For although Stephen on many occasions evinced an avaricious disposition, he was young, and the youthful heart is rarely so hardened by worldliness, but at times it may be moved by the noblest passions. The conduct of sir Roland had made a lasting impression upon him; he had stepped forward when death was hovering over him, and turned aside the fatal shaft that was about to hurl him into eternity. The baser pas-
sions

sions of his heart were dormant, and gave place to nobler feelings; nay, his very worldliness would have been grateful to the hand that preserved him to the enjoyment of it; and as if he considered his apparent indifference, and want of diligence in seeking his deliverer, had only increased the weight of the obligation, he was now resolved to make him ample amends. Besides a considerable sum of money, which he presented to the astonished knight for his present exigencies, he granted to him lands, the revenues of which were sufficient to maintain him as became a king's knight. The queen too presented him with a plain but elegant suit, that he might appear at the banquet, without any disagreeable feelings of inferiority, which the contrast of his homely garments with the embroidered suits of the other knights and nobles, might give birth to.

In the choice of this suit, Avis's taste had been consulted, declaring that neither

black nor blue would be proper—but that the plainest apparel would become him most, and show off his fine person to the best possible advantage; and Myriol concurred with her.

Little did sir Roland imagine how much he was indebted to these ladies for their pains in selecting what would best suit his complexion, or the difficulties and discussions which had passed before they were actually decided on the very important point in what manner his person should be equipped. But dress was a minor consideration with sir Roland; his mind was too pleasingly occupied to regard such trifles with any particular degree of interest; and the ladies would have been not a little mortified, had they known how indifferently he observed the beauty of the suit. His thanks to the queen were however not the less warm or sincere; and what he lacked in vanity, he made up for in the expression of his gratitude. He did not expend much time
on

on his toilette, and being quickly ready, the vassal who attended him led him to the hall, where but few of the guests were assembled.

A perfect stranger naturally excited their curiosity, and with all due courtesy they welcomed him; and he was surrounded by a group of valiant knights, conversing with them on various topics of war, when the king and queen entered the hall with their attendants.

Having received all due honours, and passed through the ceremonies always observed upon the king's taking his seat at the banquet, Stephen's eye wandered over the assembly, and at last fixing on the figure of sir Roland, he honoured him with a smile of recognition. A page soon summoned him to the king's side, and the whole fraternity of knights wondered who the stranger knight could be, observing with what distinction he was treated, and the gracious and affable converse the king held with him.—“Sir knight,” said Stephen,

phen, "thy place is with yon brave knights, who have severally distinguished themselves in our service. In adding thee to their number, I affix a jewel to our girdle of strength. As their united prowess is our armour, so art thou most truly our shield! Be seated, sir Roland; on this occasion we will make exception;" and he pointed to a seat at the royal table.

"Pardon me, your grace," said sir Roland: "my laurels are but freshly budded. There are those, veterans, and more noble far than I, who could bear such honours with more grace. I am but a young knight, and it would ill become me to sit beside my prince, even though in his courtesy he should command me to it. Oh, rather let me serve your grace, and these fair ladies; even a squire's occupation here would confer honour on the proudest noble of this happy land, where more than earthly beauty graces the board, and royal courtesy presides."

"Be it so," said the king, in nowise
displeased

displeased at the young knight's diffidence: "these ladies will be right well pleased in being served by so gallant a knight."

Matilda graciously signified her acquiescence to his request: and hereupon sir Roland took his station, and waited upon the young queen and her ladies, with as much ease as if he had been accustomed to the honourable office from his earliest years: and if they were before pleased with the frankness of his manners, they were now no less delighted with his courtly address.

Avis was highly gratified, and addressed her speech to him continually, for the sake of drawing out his excellent replies, to the no small chagrin of sir William de Lacy, who almost began to fear a rival in his mistress's heart, as well as in the favour of his prince.

But although his heart was grieved, he was compelled in courtesy to wear those smiles which must ever illumine the coun-

tenance of a favourite at the festive board, whether the heart be gay or sad.

“Truly,” said Stephen, addressing the elegant Hubert de Lacy, his prime favourite, “our young knight comports himself marvellously well. Prithee, who among this gay assemblage could mark any ungainness in him or his demeanour, or esteem him a novice in his place, so admirably doth he conduct himself?”

“’Tis indeed past comprehension,” replied the obsequious, but wily De Lacy, “that one who hath been reared among the common herd—a freeman he is indeed—but yet, perchance, the son of some rude, uncultivated ceorl. How strange it is that he should have culled so many flowers, where we, less fortunate mortals, rarely meet with any thing but weeds!”

This was uttered in a good-humoured, desultory manner, but Hubert de Lacy knew how to give point and meaning to the simplest words.

“’Tis strange!” said Stephen, thoughtfully.

fully. To raise his doubts was De Lacy's aim, and he rejoined, without seeming to notice the effect his observations had evidently made upon the king—"I marvel not that her grace and the ladies seem so pleased with his converse. His speech—his air—is so above the common—that even his older brethren in arms must confess him a perfect and accomplished knight. That his prowess and his skill in arms may have been improved in the service of his lord, the baron D'Estraville, is not impossible, for nature hath bountifully gifted him with every personal advantage. But that polished speech and ready wit should be there so perfected, is (as your grace justly remarks) most strange and unaccountable!"

"True—true!" replied the king, eagerly devouring what really appeared so feasible.

"If this prove some gallant in disguise, I should not be surprised," said Hubert de Lacy, in a pretended jocose humour,

“wishing, peradventure, to mark with his own eyes the splendour of your grace’s court, which fame hath bruited abroad, raising within him a most pardonable curiosity !”

“Disguise of every kind is hateful. ’Tis the subterfuge of a cowardly and fearful disposition, it is a blur and blot on honour, and truth spurns it,” replied Stephen, warmly.

“I do myself hold it in utter abhorrence,” replied the courtier, “but a foolish whim may have induced this knight to assume it. Youth and inexperience may plead somewhat in excuse for his fault.”

“Think’st thou so, De Lacy? Nay, trust us thou look’st with too much leniency upon this knight! Youthful he is, but hath wit enough to guard him from erring widely. Knavery, more oft than folly, prompts disguise. We must probe a little deeper here !”

“Nay, now, indeed your grace judges
too

too harshly," said De Lacy, who having most cunningly raised the king's suspicions, now feigned a defence to hold himself harmless, in the event of an issue unfavourable to his views.

"Look ye, sir baron," replied the king, whispering to De Lacy, while his eyes were directed towards sir Roland, "we have enemies abroad! May he not be a spy? hah!"

A partial conviction seemed to follow these words; at least De Lacy looked convinced, and as one on whom the light of truth hath suddenly broken.

During the latter part of this conversation, so inimical to sir Roland, the young knight had descended from the *dais*, and joined his brothers in arms; the ladies having long since retired from the banquet, where indeed they had, on this particular occasion, tarried rather longer than custom or etiquette allowed.

The nobles and knights had already drank deep of the brimming cup, and the

song and the Babel noise of many tongues arose in the place of order and ceremony. The king too had been so well supplied by his favourite, that he was but ill enabled to discriminate betwixt right and wrong, which, of course, properly prepared him for the insidious hints of De Lacy, and promoted the furtherance of his base and sinister designs. All obligation, all remembrance of the past, was forgotten, and every generous sentiment poisoned by the words of suspicion, breathed by this viper.

The king's mind was a chaos of contending thoughts, and the deep potations he had taken completely bewildered him. He had no power to weigh with equity the different points of this important case, which involved the interests of the generous and unsuspecting sir Roland, who was gaily participating in the merriment and revelry of his associates. His spirits, already exhilarated by the events of the morning, needed no aid from the inspiring
juice

juice of the grape; and his wit and good-humour made them all hail him heartily as a boon companion. He was caressed on every side. Little did his unsuspecting mind dream that the malignant De Lacy was endeavouring to blight his budding hopes, and artfully undermine the proud fabric of his smiling fortunes.

The day was far advanced; the festivity had been kept up to an unusually late hour, when Stephen withdrew. It was the signal for all to retire. Sir Roland sought the chamber allotted him. Many others followed; but some were too much overcome by their potent libations, to effect an escape, and consequently found a more convenient pallet on the rushes which were strewed in the banqueting-hall; knight and squire were sleeping indiscriminately together; debauchery and drunkenness confounded all distinction, and reduced man and master to one degrading level. But such were often the gross scenes exhibited in those early days,

and yet not without a parallel, perhaps, at many a city feast in this enlightened age.

CHAPTER VI.
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SLEEP sealed the eyes of Stephen, but his busy mind was still awake—all the monstrous imaginings of fancy filled his brain; the half-whispered suspicions of Hubert de Lacy still clung to his thoughts, and served to form the basis of a thousand tormenting unsubstantial forms, which floated through his giddy brain in rapid succession. Before the dawning of day he awoke, unrefreshed by his slumbers; but the stupifying effects of the potations he had so freely indulged in had passed away, and reason gradually began again to hold her sway, free and unshackled.

Entirely engrossed by the eventful circumstances of the preceding day, he coolly reviewed every subject, and with the severest scrutiny, reflected on the conduct  
of

of sir Roland; and when he recollected by what means he had been thrown in his way, how purely accidental, his frank, yet unobtrusive manners on that occasion, and the grateful remembrance of sir Roland's bravery in the field, he was surprised that he should have so far forgotten himself, as to yield to suspicions so injurious to the knight's honour and integrity. He wondered at his own weakness, and sought in vain for the cause which had first given rise to such unwarrantable jealousies against the youth. He endeavoured to recal the conversation which had passed at the banquet, but a very imperfect recollection of the precise words presented itself to his mind; the cunning insinuations of De Lacy were unobserved even at the time, but the feigned defence of sir Roland was remembered to the baron's honour.

Restless, the king arose at the first peep of day, and, eager to render justice to sir Roland's character, and to recant the bitter

ter expressions he had uttered during the partial bewilderment of his senses, occasioned by too free an indulgence in the tempting wines which sparkled on his plenteous board, he speedily summoned De Lacy to his presence.

“ Good morrow to your grace,” said the favourite, who had, in obedience to his royal master’s commands, made a hasty toilet, and repaired to his chamber; “ I pray your grace is well. The first cock hath scarcely crowed his welcome to the morn—I feared your grace was indisposed.”

“ Thou’rt right ; I am.”

“ What malady affects my liege?”

“ Nothing bodily, De Lacy ; my mind—my mind is ill at ease, and I would seek a cure by casting off the load that sits not lightly on it ; I would unburthen all to thee.”

“ Willingly would I bear aught that may oppress your grace,” replied De Lacy ;

Lacy; "if in me alone the remedy is found, the cure is speedy."

"Dost thou remember what passed yesternight respecting sir Roland?" inquired the king.

"I marked it well."

"Have we not acted wrong?"

Hubert de Lacy looked at the king, and imagining that he still entertained the suspicions he had so diligently endeavoured to raise—"Your grace will pardon me," replied he, cautiously, "but I do think thou wert too hasty in this affair."

"We were—indeed we were."

"But the power to undo what your grace hath done——"

"Is in our own hands," quickly replied Stephen; "and it shall be done."

"It was indeed unmerited," said De Lacy, alluding to the honour the king had bestowed on sir Roland.

"Unmerited!" repeated Stephen; "oh, most undeserved! from my hands too! We were surely blinded by some fatality.

It



It was all wrong. Our better reason was enveloped in the mist of error."

"But yet, methinks your grace need not bewail the error so bitterly," said De Lacy, who continued completely in the dark as to the real motives of Stephen. "Sir Roland rests within the castle still; and he can be provided for!" added the shrewd baron, with an emphasis which plainly indicated the meaning of the 'provision' he would have made for the young knight. He would have consigned him to death or a dungeon with equal pleasure.

But the king, only remembering how strongly De Lacy had appeared to advocate sir Roland's cause, took these words in their true acceptation.—"We have already taken care of that," replied Stephen; "he hath received his reward!"

"Indeed! So soon!" cried the astonished De Lacy; and his depraved imagination instantly pictured to him the incarceration, or probably the assassination of the knight.

"Ay,"

“Ay,” rejoined the king; “promptness; on these occasions, is the best policy. We cannot too soon secure such men as sir Roland.”

“’Twas wisely done,” said De Lacy. “In these troublous times, when your grace hath so many foes abroad, you cannot be too guarded.”

“Therefore do we regard the winning of such a bold and valiant knight as sir Roland an enviable acquisition to our strength. The honours and wealth we bestow on him are repaid twofold by his services and loyalty.”

Hubert de Lacy stared with unfeigned surprise at this unexpected issue, and actually believed, that either the king or he must be still dreaming.

“How could we for a single moment entertain the ungenerous suspicion that he was a spy, merely because nature has bestowed on him superior gifts? How like envy doth this appear! Is it possible that we could so soon forget the services  
he

he hath rendered us? A moment's reflection would have acquitted him. What deception or duplicity can there possibly exist in such a character? Would a frank, brave, generous soul like his, stoop to the meanness of espionage? Could our rescue on the battle-field be a concerted measure to win our favour for any base purpose? No; for death was around us, and fled before his valour. In truth, the more we reflect on the past, the more glorious his actions appear; and we most heartily regret that we should ever have given vent to those sentiments, which were assuredly the offspring of a confused brain, and not the genuine feelings of the heart. To thee alone, De Lacy, were those sentiments expressed. Let that conversation pass into oblivion, although we shall never forget how much we owe to thy defence of sir Roland! It was generous, and well became the brave De Lacy, to guard the bright honour of a brother knight from the foul tarnish of such vile aspersions.

Thou

Thou didst judge him—as we should have beheld him—honest and loyal.”

Hubert de Lacy felt this praise unmerited, and had just cause to thank his stars that he had acted with such well-conducted duplicity in this instance. Throughout, his ambiguity and caution had preserved him, to all appearance, from any participation in the offence against sir Roland; and notwithstanding he lamented the absolute failure of his plot, he congratulated himself that he had escaped in the attempt without blemish.

“These sentiments are the result of the most mature deliberations,” continued Stephen, “which have occupied our thoughts since long before the dawning. Go thou, De Lacy; and when sir Roland shall appear, bid him hither, and aid us in endeavouring to make every amends for an injury, whereof, although the knight be ignorant, we did still offer it. Our thoughts, even when kept within our own breasts, may breed more mischief than  
thoughtless

thoughtless actions would perchance accomplish. The latter may meet with opposition; but the former have none but our partial prejudices to combat with."

Hubert de Lacy took his leave, and instantly repaired to the chamber of sir William—the inheritor of all his father's virtues—and imperfections—to communicate to him what had recently transpired, and give vent to his invidious murmurs against the partiality of Stephen.—“We must keep a lynx-eyed watchfulness upon this new-risen star!” said De Lacy, “or he will gain such an ascendancy over the king’s mind, that our united power will avail us little, when counterbalanced by this new favourite.”

“And in the name of Heaven,” said sir William, “wherefore is all this extraordinary favour shewn him? How hath he deserved it?”

“By his valour; so says the king.”

“His valour!” echoed sir William, sneeringly; “and prithee what did he perform

perform but his duty? Methinks he hath bewitched his grace, or he could never repay his services so much above their deserts."

"And that which he deems his frankness is mere audacity."

"And his gallantry impertinent familiarity."

"Familiarity indeed!" said Hubert de Lacy. "Didst thou observe how he engrossed the attention of the queen—and she, with all a woman's weakness, smilingly devouring his absurdities and broad flattery? By-the-bye, methinks that chattering little wench, Avis, paid too much regard to his speech. Take heed—watch her narrowly—ay, and that obtrusive fellow too. Her levity, and his overweening vanity, may lead him to a breach of courtesy. Thou understandest me—there may be a fair chance of throwing thyself in the way of offence; a hasty word or two may breed a quarrel."

"I'll draw him on! 'tis odd if my rapier



pier do not master his best skill, at any rate."

"No doubt on't," replied Hubert. "Didst thou not bleed the chevalier Pérot, the master of fence? and can this untutored knight cope with thee? No: his strength must needs yield to superior skill."

"'Tis well, if this can be accomplished," said sir William. "I shall be on the alert: he shall not wink, but I will know it. Meanwhile, lest this should fail, we will devise some other projects, that we may be so well prepared, that turn which side he will, he'll find a weapon in his way. In these times of general commotion, may we not send him to gather fresh laurels in the field? We'll use our interest to augment his glory! He shall not lack for friends to push him on."

"Yet how will this advance the end proposed?" asked sir William. "Would it not be wiser to let him here indulge in idleness, and grow useless for the want  
of

of use? 'Twere better far to leave him here, while we go reap the harvest of honour."

"Not so," replied Hubert de Lacy—"honour is bright as the beams of the noonday sun—but quite as unsubstantial too!—a mere word, used to spur on courage to the field! Wherever the king moves, there let us be found, faithful as his shadow. In absence we, and our merits, may be forgotten; or if remembered, appear but in dimness and insignificance in the vast distance. I have marked the bravest veterans in my time, who have spent their prime and best blood in the field: I have seen them more often honoured with deep scars, and high-sounding, empty praises, than substantial rewards. These were all monopolized by those who were too loyal and too wise to quit the royal court, in whose rich atmosphere they fattened, taking good care to keep their coffers well replenished, though perchance their steel was untarnished,

nished, except indeed in some petty fray, with those of their sort, who were angry enough to appear courageous. No, no—the air the king breathes must be the breath of our nostrils; if he take the field, we must follow—and policy will there direct our movements when to be brave, and how to show it to the best advantage.”

“Then must this sir Roland—this upstart, be dispatched,” said sir William. “Think’st thou absence will work forgetfulness? The king is not prone to that default. His mind and memory are strong and faithful——”

“He never forgets a kindness, or forgives an injury. I have made his mind and thoughts my study, and I know the minutest movements of his heart. I am aware that death alone will change that we desire. Where the knight seeks fame, there may he find it; he shall not lack friends to help him to glory and—to heaven!”

Sir William de Lacy shuddered at his  
VOL. II. F father's

father's baseness; his heart was not yet so steeled to every better feeling of humanity, that he could plot unmoved the assassination of a fellow-creature in cold blood.

For the space of a minute he regarded the baron in silent horror. De Lacy read his passing thoughts, and in a heartless, taunting manner, continued—"If thou would'st stand tamely by, and see this minion deprive thee of that favour which is thy due, 'tis not for me to bid thee draw thy sword to contest thy right with a stranger—a rival—and a formidable one. What I have spoken is for thee and thine—thereout nothing profitable will accrue to me."

"I am aware of this."

"Then why shrink'st thou within thyself so fearfully? Is there aught thou darest not do to hold thy present footing firmly? Shall this rude knight thrust thee aside, without reproof, or unchastised?—

tised?—a beggar—a poor knight—who hath not wherewithal to support his title.”

“ I dare do any thing that will not tarnish mine honour—all that the strongest nerve and well-tried skill may prove, I am prepared to execute,” replied sir William.

“ Be bold and resolute: look to the end to be obtained, and think not of the intermediate means which are to be employed in the accomplishment of it.”

“ Guide me,” said the young knight—  
“ I will go unerringly by thy direction.”

Upon this they separated, and a few hours afterwards they were paying their court to sir Roland, with a well-dissembled affability and good-humour, that was no less pleasing to Stephen than to the unsuspecting knight, whose frank disposition was completely duped by this shew of friendliness.

The baron and sir William secretly congratulated themselves on so fit a subject for their machinations, while the un-

abated—nay, increasing partiality of the king, which manifested itself in every little act or word addressed to sir Roland, urged them on to facilitate his downfall.



CHAPTER VII.  
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A SHORT interval of peace induced Stephen to fit out an expedition against Normandy, to subdue that dukedom, which he regarded as his lawful inheritance, but which, during his struggles to gain the crown of England, had been usurped by the French.

Stephen was made to shine in war, and the intestine troubles of his reign unfortunately gave him but too many opportunities of displaying his prowess ; for his power no sooner extinguished the fire of rebellion, which momentarily blazed in one quarter, than it broke out with undiminished fierceness in another. Those whom his munificence or his necessities had exalted, ungratefully revolted against him, whenever the chance of advancing their

own interests presented itself. Distrust was consequently the result of this defection of his selfish allies; and almost incessantly during his reign, Stephen's sword was his sceptre, and his helm his crown.

Among others who were chosen to accompany him on his expedition, Hubert de Lacy and his son were not forgotten, although, to their infinite chagrin, sir Roland was also nominated in the king's selection. They had hoped he might have been overlooked on this occasion—that a partial exclusion from the king's sight might have operated in abating the ardent estimation in which he was at present held.

It may naturally be supposed that every nerve was strained to effect their purpose—every stratagem that tended thereto, without the risk of unmasking the deformity of their jealous feelings, was resorted to. The baron, in his deceitful assumption of extraordinary favour towards the young knight, earnestly prayed the king
to

to impose upon him the honourable office of defending some of the royal castles, during his intended absence. By this interested interference, however, De Lacy only arrived more speedily at the truth he had anticipated and dreaded ; for Stephen promptly informed him of his intention to carry him with him, and that he had already given sir Roland notice to prepare to accompany him to Normandy.—“ To more experienced hands,” said the king, “ we’ll leave the defence of our castles—to those whose heads have grown wiser as their arms grew weaker. Youth, joined to such valour as sir Roland’s, will be far better employed in the field. To enclose him in watchful inactivity within the walls of a fortress, would damp the noble ardour of his youthful spirit. No, no, baron de Lacy, the tented field is the proper theatre for the display of his prowess.”

“ True—true, your grace,” replied De Lacy, biting his lips with vexation. “ How often do we, in our eagerness to serve, over-

look the true means whereby our kindness is to be the most easily accomplished !”

“ And would sir William, think ye, De Lacy, willingly agree to a separation from our favourite ?” asked Stephen. “ ’Twould be cruelty to deprive him of a companion to whom he appears so warmly attached. A similarity of years and pursuits have drawn them towards each other ; they are already sworn brothers.”

“ I have marked their growing friendship,” replied the specious De Lacy, “ and the desire of emulation will doubtless exalt them both in their honourable career.”

“ The twain are worth a barony : two nobler, braver hearts, never beat beneath a shirt of mail,” said Stephen, who was ever enthusiastic in the praise of valour. “ What think ye, De Lacy, that sprightly damsel, Avis, asserted the other day ? The wench would have it that there exists a strong semblance in the features of sir Roland and thy son !”

“ Indeed !” said De Lacy, more interested

rested with reflections on his disappointment than the conversation of the king.

"She is a merry girl ; and when she lacks subjects for discourse, invents them, merely to keep her tongue in practice."

"There is no truth in't then?"

"Less truth than fancy, methinks, your grace," replied De Lacy ; and finding he had completely failed in his principal aim, he quickly formed an excuse for concluding the conference.

While this conversation was passing, sir Roland and his "sworn brother" sir William, were discoursing together upon the projected expedition.

"I have selected a most comely hawberk from the king's armory, by his grace's especial kindness," said sir Roland, "as fair a suit of double chain mail as ever harnessed knight."

"How do I long to see thee don it!" cried sir William. "By the mass! we shall be the envy of our fraternity. In height and might we may compete with

any knight who hath the honour of serving his grace."

"Compete! sayst thou, sir William?" exclaimed sir Roland in badinage, with a true coxcombical air; "I'faith now where is the knight can shew such a muscular, well-turned limb as that," stretching out his right leg, and slapping his brawny thigh; "there's strength and beauty, combined with agility! Compete! pshaw! they may stuff their chamois *gambesons* till they burst again, and make their legs like the knotted limbs of an oak, but they will never attain that natural perfection!"

At this conceit both the young knights were fain to give vent to their mirth in a fit of laughter.

"By my beard!" continued sir Roland, "the which is but yet in its youth, I vow I will only yield to competition with the gallant sir William de Lacy."

"Nay, now," cried sir William, in an expostulatory tone, with all the awkwardness

ness which a man naturally feels on being flattered to his face.

“ Spare thy speech,” interrupted sir Roland ; “ I did not mean to flatter thee on thy shape. Thou art not feminine enough for my compliments. ’Tis against my nature to offer my incense at a whiskered shrine. So help me, sir William, I only meant to probe thy vanity—I find thou hast a smattering, a small particle, by that pleasant smirk that curled up the corners of thy mustachios.”

“ And am I to be blamed?” said sir William ; “ have I not cause to be vain in my confessed similitude to so favoured a cavalier as sir Roland, the pride——”

“ Hold there, I prithee, sweet sir William, or I shall reply ; that reply may savour of flattery, and we shall, willy nilly, begin to bandy about such sweet words, that were better spared for the entertainment of our mistress’s ears.”

“ *Our* mistresses !” said sir William, emphatically ; “ then am I to consider

that *we* are both actually declared and devoted knights to two certain dames?"

"Faith now, I'm puzzled to answer that simple query," replied sir Roland; "that is, I am not positively assured that we are both in that particular and most enviable predicament thou hast mentioned."

"What, so gallant a knight, and no mistress, whose image may cheer in peril, and nerve thine arm in the mortal combat?" said sir William. "By St. Agnes, a knight had better lack a buckler than a mistress! Hast thou never beheld an eye whose beam was sunshine to thy soul? an honeyed lip, that wooed the kiss? a gentle bosom moved by sighs that were sweeter than the breath of flowers?"

"I have seen many gentle dames."

"And none to move thee—to win thine heart to love?"

"Why, truly," replied sir Roland, hesitatingly, "my fancy hath imaged forth a mistress to mine eye. A mere dreamy, vision-

visionary being, pictured in the air—somewhere 'twixt heaven and earth!"

"Hath nothing more substantial struck thee?" asked sir William.

"Nothing."

"What think'st thou of the queen's damsels—Avis?"

"Pretty."

"Nothing more."

"Witty, and fascinating in her manners."

"And Myriol?"

"Beautiful and bright."

"And witty?"

"Enough—but still more good humour and pleasantry than wit—amiable and even in her temper. Smiles are *her* weapons—glances Avis's."

"Right well defined!" exclaimed sir William; "I give thee credit for the shrewdness of thy observations—and thy preference?"

"Nay—I have not the liberty to choose."

"Where-

“Wherefore not?”

“Is not the witty Avis thine?”

“Who told thee this?”

“Her own eloquent eyes. ’Tis confessed—and no secret. She hath too much candour to conceal her partiality, and peradventure is too proud of her conquest to wish the secret of thy subjugation to slumber in her own breast.”

“Then thou wast smitten.”

“No, by my faith, sir William, I am invulnerable to her killing glances. I presently marked the direction of her tenderness, and my heart became proof against any surprise,” replied sir Roland. “She is a lively fascinating demoiselle, but her affections being pre-engaged, to my fastidious eye, she is shorn of all those dazzling rays with which a lover’s partial fancy ever adorns his ruling star.”

“Then thou dost profess no rivalry?”

“None. And dost thou imagine for a moment that I am possessed of such vanity as to dare to hope to supplant the
gay

gay and gallant sir William de Lacy in any lady's heart? Nay, moreover, I do assure thee, that those lips that have once smiled on another, have lost all witchery for me. I must be the first and only one in that lady's heart, in whose favour I place mine honour and devote my life."

"The young and beautiful Myriol perforce may please."

"Please! she must always charm! I have looked on her with a pleasure inexpressible, but she appears so much superior to the humble, though fortunate sir Roland, that I have not dared to think that I might feel any other sentiment than the most respectful admiration."

"Ha! ha! ha! A very pretty, serious sort of a confession!" cried sir William de Lacy, laughing aloud. "Thou art growing dolorous and sentimental—a certain sign of the influence of the tender passion. Respectful admiration! Ha! ha! ha!"

Sir Roland looked confused at this rail-
lery,

lery, which he in vain endeavoured to parry with any success ; and he now, for the first time, began seriously to reflect that he actually felt more than he had even confessed to himself for the fair Myriol, and that there was both truth and justice in the jocular remarks of sir William de Lacy. He joined in the knight's hearty laugh, but it was feigned—and he adroitly turned the conversation to a different topic. Their arms and horses, and the busy preparations for the expedition, offered an extensive field for observation and comment.

“ I will match my black destrier, for bone, figure, and blood, with any animal in the field,” said sir William.

“ I deny not his strength or his beauty,” replied sir Roland ; “ nevertheless I shall not fear any detracting comparison by bringing my roan stallion beside him. Such a breast for a *poitrinal*—with a glossy neck, arched like a rainbow, and adorned with a flowing mane, that 'twould be
sin

sin to conceal beneath the best *crinière* that ever armourer turned from his anvil."

"Hold! hold!" cried sir William, "or thy fond praises of thy courser will make me look on mine with comparative contempt. Thou speakest partially—I must see this wonderful quadruped, that is to have the honour of being bestrode by such a doughty knight. Prithee, how much didst thou draw for him? Such a rare beast must have doubtless cost a rare price!"

"Some forty shillings," said sir Roland, with an air of indifference, that bespoke his contempt for the expenditure of what in those days was considered an extravagant sum.

"By the mass, a rare cost!" cried sir William.

"And, by the mass, a rare beast!" responded sir Roland. "I would rather have the steed than the money. His flank is worthy to be pressed by any prince's thigh in Christendom."

"Good

“ Good Lord, I shall not rest in peace till I behold this delectable destrier! I pray thee, good sir Roland, when did he arrive?”

“ Early this morn.”

“ Bid thy squire lead him forth.”

“ By my troth,” exclaimed sir Roland, slapping his thigh, “ that minds me of a most important circumstance. Being but so young a knight, I have scarcely be-thought me of a squire yet; but I’ll have one anon—a rare fellow! that is, if death hath not cut short his mortal career; for he was not the soul to slink from danger, being a right clever hand at a baton or a blade—an I win him to my service——”

“ Thou’lt have the best man and the best beast among us,” said sir William, heartily enjoying sir Roland’s enthusiastic praise of his newly-purchased horse, and his intended squire.

“ Nay, thine eyes shall do me justice,” replied sir Roland.

“ Prithee, now tell me,” said sir Wil-
liam,

liam, "is it that dark, wild-looking being?"

"Gervase? oh no, poor fellow! To be sure he hath every bodily recommendation for such an office, and fidelity enough for a dozen squires; but his mind is governed by the changes of the moon; he would be wanting when he was most wanted. No, no, the carl my memory points at hath a merry humour, that will be as pleasant in a dreary march, as a rivulet in a desert: but an thou wilt, we'll seek him in company; he serves in the ranks of sir Reginald de Travers, an I mistake not."

"Who is at present sojourning in the city of London?" said sir William.

"The same."

"And the lady Myriol's father."

"Hah! say'st thou so?"

"I do assure thee."

"I knew it not—I am astounded.—She the daughter of that valiant chief? It glads my heart to see so fair a fruit from such a noble stock. I shall have little trouble then, I ween, in the accomplishment

ment of my wishes. I'll sue him to yield me the service of that carl I marked."

"Bear with thee some token from his fair daughter, whom he loves dearer than his life," said sir William, "and thy cause is won. Shall I intercede?"

"Gramercy! and a thousand victories to thee, sir knight! But I would fain prefer mine own suit. If she deny me, I vow 'twill be with a smile, and that smile were worth the winning, even at the cost of a denial."

"Onward then, and success attend thee—thou to the dame, and I to thy incomparable steed! What ho! Gerard! Valance! Dubois!"

CHAPTER VIII.
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“WHITHER goest thou, Perkyn? ‘Thou’rt running all ways, like ivy round an oak trunk, to-day,” said Ralphe.

“’Deed am I,” replied Perkyn, in his wonted tone of ill humour.

“And what bear’st thou?”

“A brace of fat pullets.”

“For fat father Dominic, I ween?”

“Ay.”

“For which thou’lt get a *benedicite*. Much good may it do thee, coz!”

“William Brisset might find a better market for his pence and his pullets too, than sending them thither. Milk to a cow is no favour.”

“Thou ungracious varlet!” cried Ralphe, “darest thou murmur at thine uncle’s beneficence? Is not father Dominic (a proper

proper example of the excellence of monastic mortification!) his confessor? An Brisset do give him pullets, Dominic stuffs him with grace and piety in return. What is the fatness of the land balanced against the orisons of such holy men, the odour of whose sanctity is incense to one's nostrils?"

"I would that his sanctity had power to sweeten Brisset's humour. For my part, methinks he only infects him with ill-temper; he huffs and cuffs me without ceasing."

"Heaven mend him!" cried Ralphe; "time and trouble crack many a brittle temper."

"I shall have to wait half a glass for the boat; a fine time for the ferrys, since the bridge was burnt; although, I dare be sworn, the monks of 'Thorney\* have not so many guests as heretofore."

"So much the better for them," replied Ralphe.

\*A monastery on the Surrey side of the Thames.



Ralphe. "Those on this side the river that would beg, cannot approach their charitable hands, while those that give, have wherewithal to enable them to reach their receiving hoods."

"Umph!" cried Perkyn. "Yonder comes Brisset; I must needs depart." And he strode hastily away.

"Now for a grave discourse," soliloquized Ralphe. "By the Lord, 'tis a blessing to escape from nuncle and coz for a day together! One is as solemn as a church bell, and t'other as sour as butter-milk in July. I am growled to death by one, and preached into purgatory by the other. I would give an honest pint of mead to avoid this meeting; but one might as well attempt to run from one's shadow as from Brisset. So here I must needs stand till his long legs bring him to me. Mirth, lie still and slumber! Let every merry thought that is wont to tickle me die unborn. An a single smirk curl  
up

up the corners of my mouth, that's a drubbing."

So, smoothing his laughing face to sobriety, he rested in a musing attitude against the trunk of an elm, under which he was standing. The spot where he had accidentally fallen in with his cousin was just without Aldgate, where, being a pleasant sunshiny day, he had strolled from the narrow dirty streets of the city, to enjoy the freshness of the air without the walls. A few hundred paces beyond the gate, were fields and trees, growing in all that rural beauty which is now only to be found at some miles distant from the present widely-extended metropolis.

"Good morrow, uncle," said Ralphe, as William Brisset drew nigh.

"'Tis the last morrow, thank Heaven!" said the old warrior, "that we shall see in this unclean city for a time. We return to-night."

"So soon!" cried Ralphe, astonished at this unexpected intelligence, and loth to quit

quit a place where he had passed his days so merrily.

“ Sir Reginald de Travers hath no longer occasion for our services ; we may sheathe our swords, and till the fields again. My spirit hath groaned long enough under the oppressive idleness in which we have lived since our sojournment hither.”

“ I’faith, good mine uncle, I have not found the time hang so heavily on my hands.”

“ Doubtless not, Ralphe ; thou’rt young, and thy heart is led away by the pleasures of this great city ; thine inexperienced eyes cannot discern the deformed features of vice beneath the gaudy colours in which it is tricked out. For my part, I see nought here but drunkenness and debauchery. Every evil is disguised and miscalled ; bawdry is named wit ; licentiousness, gallantry ; debosherie and noisy night-revels, pleasure. The example of the old and depraved excuseth wicked-

ness to the young, and they fall into error even with their eyes open; and their better reason is silenced by the blindness of their inclinations!"

"I've marked all this," replied Ralphe—"I have pondered on the daily increase of immorality, and have bethought me that the firm example of a few good men might much amend the condition thereof. But the virtuous fly from the spotted taint of vice in terror, and thereby leave their brethren to sink deeper and deeper into the slough wherein their passions have cast them!"

William Brisset groaned in spirit, and cast up his eyes to heaven. But the preachment of honest Ralphe, who would gladly have prevailed upon his pious uncle to prolong his stay, for the good purposes quoted, failed in its aim.

"To tarry here would be courting danger," said William Brisset; "the wicked would only meet our kind remonstrances with mockery. 'Tis safer to fly the danger  
than

than endeavour to overcome it. Therefore prepare; we return homewards to-night, there to labour in our vocation, till the troubles of the land shall again demand our services."

As he concluded speaking, the clatter of approaching horsemen drew their attention, and looking out, they observed two cavaliers within bow-shot of them, making for the city.

"There come two rays of royalty," said Ralphe; "I know by their gear and trappings they are king's knights. There's cattle! How their sleek glossy skins shine in the sun!"

"They have truly a noble bearing, be they king's knights or no knights," replied the old warrior, whose heart was ever warmed by martial pomp.

"That roan for me," said Ralphe; "he seems so proud of his rider, and bears himself as if he knew his strength and beauty."

“Doff thy cap, Ralphe, as they pass us—respect is due to bravery.”

“The more especially when it boasts of the additional grace of royal favour,” added Ralphe, rightly appreciating his uncle’s respect; “the king’s horse is as good as a gentle. I know on which side the sun shines as well as any he that wears a beard.”

The horsemen rode up.—“Are the streets fit for a horse’s hoof, goodman—will they bear? I wish not my steed to be booted with mud,” said sir William de Lacy, addressing William Brisset: and curious as the young knight’s query may seem, it is actually a fact, that the narrow streets of London, being unpaved, were in a sorry condition for the progress of horse or carriage. A heavy rain rendered them almost impassable, and there being then no sewers to carry off the impurities, they were unceremoniously thrown into the streets, which combined with the decayed vegetables and the dirty rushes,



rushes, which were then used in the houses for covering the brick floors, formed altogether the most disagreeable ways in all seasons, and in hot weather evolved an effluvium which was any thing but savory or salubrious.

“The sun hath done much for them, sir knight,” replied Brisset, bowing lowly; “and though they be not so fair as this broad road, thou’lt find them in excellent order.”

“Know’st thou where dwells sir Reginald de Travers?” asked sir Roland, who accompanied the young De Lacy.

“I will straightway lead thee thither, if it please ye, sir knights,” said Ralphe, stepping forward; “we are his servitors and vassals.”

“By the mass!” exclaimed sir Roland, turning to his companion, and pointing to Ralphe, “this is the very wight I’m seeking—a lucky chance!”

“An’ there be luck, sir knight,” replied Ralphe, “the same must perforce

be all to my vantage, seeing that I am in a condition rather to receive than bestow good."

William Brisset twitched his glib nephew's doublet, but he was not to be restrained. He had discretion enough to know when his wit was well or ill-timed; and he read more encouragement than displeasure in the fair-favoured countenances of the young knights.—"I pray thee, sir knight," continued he, "solve me this query, if it be not considered an impertinence—how didst thou mark me?"

"I met thee at Exeter."

"Good lack! and is it a possibility thy courteous eye could have distinguished so humble a carl among so many? every ram hath a tail and a fleece."

"Ay, true, but 'twas thy bleating I marked," replied sir Roland, continuing the same odd figure of speech, and laughing.

"Bleating thou mayst truly call it, sir knight," interposed William Brisset; "I  
trust

trust ye will not take offence at his freedom."

"None, none, goodman," replied sir William, staring at his lank figure and lugubrious countenance; "leave the youth with us, and go thou to sir Reginald de Travers, and inform him that sir William de Lacy and sir Roland will forthwith have the honour of embracing him."

William Brisset bowed, and giving an expressive look to his thoughtless nephew, to warn him to conduct himself with proper respect, departed on his errand.

"Who is that melancholy man?" asked sir Roland, looking after him as he strode over the ground at his usual rapid rate.

"Sir knight, that is nuncle."

"Who could have thought he was of thy kin?" said sir William; "I would wage my dagger he hath not a spice of mirth in him."

"He hath a good heart," replied Ralphe, "though in truth be it spoken, I have

never caught a smile illuminating the furrows of his face. He is brave, but as cold as December when he is not fighting. But he hath trained me up, and I owe him much."

"Thou canst be grateful then?" said sir Roland.

"If the favour be given in good will, I think on the donor—if it be bestowed in the pride of patronage, 'tis enough to bear the favour, without the remembrance of the patron."

"Would'st thou quit his service?"

"An' I could better my condition, he would not object to be rid of me."

"Would'st thou serve me? I need a squire."

"'Twould like me much," replied Ralphe, his honest countenance brightening with joy at the proposal; "I would serve thee right faithfully, with heart and hand. A good knight maketh a good squire. Like a smooth lake, which re-  
flecteth

flecteth the heavens, I take the hue and complexion of those above me."

"Art thou honest in principle as frank in speech?"

"I have never been tempted—God wot whether it be my upright inclination or want of opportunity. I do believe I'm trustworthy; but trust and try me, and should temptation urge me to rebel, hang me up for a scarecrow to villainy, and let my carcase be a moral mark for the warning of all squires of low or high degree. My heart is with thee, sir knight."

"Thou speak'st fair," said sir Roland.

"Fair promises are as bright and as unstable as sunbeams. Actions speak better than the smoothest tongue," said Ralphe; and he led the way, walking beside the two cavaliers.

As they passed through the gates, they encountered a proud austere knight, of portly size, mounted on a grey charger, coming forth from the city. He returned their courteous salutation; but the very

low, humble obeisance of honest Ralphe only met with a supercilious toss of superiority.

“In verity,” quoth Ralphe, “yonder is a great man (in bulk!) one who thinks a vast deal (of himself); and there is not a citizen that does not regard him (with contempt).”

“A rare character,” said sir William; “and yet thou didst bend most hypocritically low before him; wherefore this?”

“Thy pardon, sir knight,” replied Ralphe; “I bent to hide the irresistible smile that naturally tickles me when I come in contact with that burley knight. Moreover, we can never stoop too low to these men, who stand so high in their own opinion; in proportion as we descend, do they appear to be exalted in their own estimation; and the less there is of thee, the more they love thee; for these upstarts delight to look down upon every body.”

Discoursing in this manner, they speedily



dily arrived at the residence of sir Reginald de Travers, with whom sir Roland felt an earnest desire to become acquainted; he had heard much of the bluff old knight, and was already greatly prejudiced in his favour. The almost indefinable sentiments he respectfully entertained for the fair daughter of sir Reginald, served not a little to enhance the worth of the father in his estimation, and he looked forward to the interview with interest, anticipating much pleasure.

The name of De Lacy was alone a sufficient introduction to sir Reginald de Travers; for, ignorant of the political intrigues of the father and son, he only esteemed them for their martial virtues; and the courage both of Hubert and sir William unquestionably merited the meed of universal praise they received, both from sovereign and subject.

CHAPTER IX.  
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THE residence of sir Reginald de Travers was situate at the northern extremity of the city, near Aldersgate. From the narrow street, two large oaken gates opened into a court of some fifty feet square, in the centre of which a fountain, or *jet d'eau*, threw up its small gushing stream, and fell, pattering and sparkling, over the figure of the sea-god, whose breath seemed to impel the inexhaustible waters.

The building was a quadrangle, formed by a colonnade of rude columns, supporting a wide gallery, leading to the different apartments of the mansion. To the banqueting-hall one whole division was exclusively allotted; and at the door of this noble room, which faced the principal

pal gates, appeared sir Reginald de Travers, to receive his guests with all due honour. Four valets, wearing the knight's livery, held the young warriors' stirrups, and assisted them in dismounting.

Sir Reginald embraced the knights, and led them into the hall, where they found the hospitable board covered for their entertainment; mead, malvoisie, clairy, and the choicest wines then in vogue, were handed to his guests in embossed wine-cups.

In the mean time, sir Roland took an opportunity of entering upon the purport of his visit, presenting a small ring, which Myriol had bidden him deliver, as a token of her love, to her fond father; but sir Roland had already so well ingratiated himself in the good opinion of the old knight, by his frank, ingenuous manners, that he needed not the powerful influence of the fair Myriol to gain the acquiescence of sir Reginald, who, without hesitation, granted him his request in such courteous terms,

terms, that he made the reception of his vassal appear rather as an obligation received by him, than conferred on sir Roland.

In the course of the day, many other knights joined the trio, and by the coming of evening, formed a most jocund party, none enjoying more heartily than sir Reginald the wit and vivacity of sir Roland, who shone forth the presiding spirit, the brilliant jewel, of the convivial circle.

Time flew swiftly in the enjoyment of festivity; the shades of night had closed upon one half the world, and the moon had arisen, in all her brightness and glory, ere the young knights thought of quitting the hospitable board. Sir Reginald reluctantly bade farewell to sir Roland, whom he would fain have detained for a day or two, had not his services been so peremptorily demanded by the king, who was expected so shortly to depart for Normandy; but he gave him a most flattering

tering invitation to revisit him on his return from abroad, should the fate of war decree that he should escape from its many perils unscathed.

Accompanied by the elated Ralphe, on foot, the young knights set forth from the city, both equally gratified with the events of the day, and exceedingly merry from the exhilarating effects of the generous wine they had quaffed. Ralphe trotted on beside his new master, pondering on the happy change in his fortunes, and turning over in his mind the sage advice of the valiant and very pious William Brisset, his loving uncle, who had taken vast pains in endeavouring to inculcate the most moral and methodical principles, in a long conversation with his gay nephew, which lecture endured almost from the coming to the going of the knights; and although the jocose varlet had paid but very little attention to the grave maxims of Brisset, he averred that the axioms quoted were of such a nature, that the remembrance

membrane and practice of one-twentieth part of them would render him a most moral and exemplary character. His meditations were but seldom interrupted by the knight, whose mirthful sallies gradually subsided to a calm and profound reverie. Sir Roland alone broke the silence at intervals, by some remark upon the courtesy and good-humour of their host, or some trivial interrogation directed to his new squire, whose replies were always as witty and pointed as they were ready.

After much delay and difficulty, they obtained a ferry; for it was past ten o'clock, and a most unusual hour for any soul to be stirring abroad. It was near twelve however before they came within sight of the castle where the king was then sojourning. The moon shone bright on its castellated towers, as they arose from among the dark trees which clustered thickly around.

“ Another mile, and we shall have completed

pleted our task," remarked sir Roland ; and pointing to the distant castle, added — " How majestically those towers rear their white crowns above the trees ! they look like the foam on the dark green waves of the ocean."

" And like those waves, what treasures, what precious pearls, lie sleeping beneath them !" replied sir William, sighing.

Sir Roland faintly echoed the sigh ; and at the same time stooping to pat his horse, a loud cry from sir William thrilled in his ears ; and turning quickly round, he beheld the young knight falling from his steed. Ralphé flew to his assistance, and caught him in his arms, while sir Roland as quickly dismounted to learn the cause of his sudden outcry.

" Treachery !" said sir William, gasping with pain ; " some hidden hand hath stricken me with a bolt ! Avenge me, sir knight, for the love of Heaven ! Let not my foe escape. Yonder, from the left, it came—fly, quickly ! If I die unrevenged, my
spirit

spirit will not rest. Let me see the blood of mine enemy flow, and I care not if his blow be mortal !”

Without delay, laying the wounded knight upon the road side, sir Roland and Ralphe drew their swords, and struck into the wood, in the direction from whence the bolt was shot, with the firm resolution of beating the bushes for the cowardly assassin. They separated, moving so as to form a circuit, proposing to meet again at some distance.

Sir Roland had not proceeded far, when Ralphe burst eagerly through the tangled bushes, and joined him.

“ This way, sir knight. The heartless carl is safe,” said the squire, “ for I vow by St. Anthony, I saw him struggling in the clutches of the devil, or one of his imps.”

“ Lead on !” cried sir Roland ; and instantly penetrating the thick wood, the squire led his master to the spot where he averred he had seen the man.

Here,

Here, at the bottom of a sharp acclivity, thickly wooded, they distinctly observed the figures of two men in the moonlight: the one was evidently struggling beneath the gripe of the other.

“By my soul! it was but a bird-bolt I shot; my aim was a partridge,” said the one expostulating.

“Art thou gifted with the eyes of an owl, that thou canst mark thy prey at night? Do partridges fly from their cover when the sun is below the hills? Thou’rt a liar! a snake in the grass! The trampling of horses was in mine ears when thy *quarrel** was shot.”

“’Tis he,” cried sir Roland, rushing forward. “Hold him fast and firm, I pray you; he hath stricken a noble knight! Ah! what, Gervase!” exclaimed the knight, recognising his old acquaintance, the Black Boy. “Hast thou caught the viper? By the mass! but he shall pay dearly for his shot.

* *Quarrel*, a bolt for the cross-bow.

shot. Ralphe, take thy girdle, and securely bind the knave."

All hope of effecting an escape was vain, and terror appeared completely to overcome the guilty wretch, whose trembling limbs were quickly bound; and Gervase taking him on his brawny shoulders, without the least assistance from knight or squire, carried off his prisoner in triumph, leading them by a circuitous path, with which he appeared well acquainted, to the road again, near to the spot where they had left sir William.

The knight was sitting up, and they found him, to their unfeigned pleasure, much recovered from the shock of the sudden blow. The quarrel, or square-headed bolt, had stricken him on the left shoulder, and by its amazing force, dented in the steel pouldron, or shoulder-piece, causing him much pain; for although it did not draw blood, it had bruised him sorely.

"How fare thee, sir William?" demanded

manded sir Roland, running eagerly towards him.

“Better—far better. Hast thou succeeded?” added he, anxiously.

“We have—they are even now coming hither. The varlet is well bound and guarded—I defy him to escape. The Black Boy——”

“I liked not that wild idiot,” quickly interrupted sir William; “I did fear me there was more of evil than good in him!”

“Nay, nay, judge not too hastily,” replied sir Roland, rather chagrined at the knight’s ungrounded and ungenerous prejudices against his favourite. “He is not thine enemy—’twas not his honest hand that levelled the blow—he did secure the vile perpetrator of this dark deed. See! he brings him hither!”

Sir William was silent, and without offering further comment or observation, he tacitly yielded to the directions and arrangements of his friend.

Sir Roland having ordered them to
place

place the culprit across his roan, assisted sir William to remount his destrier, and then proceeded with all expedition towards the castle, Gervase keeping strict watch over his charge, who for better security preceded the knights. Sir Roland and Ralphe walked on either side the wounded knight.

“Thanks to the stoutness of my poul-dron,” said sir William, “or I verily believe the quarrel would have passed through me, it came with such force.”

“Truly a marvellous fair *arbalist*,” said Ralphe, examining the cross-bow, which he had picked up after securing the man. “It requireth an arm of no mean strength to fix it. Doubtless the fellow is a keen-eyed—steady-handed *arbalister*, employed by some ignoble *noble*, who oweth your worship a grudge. In verity, I would rather that he made a mark of me by moonlight than daylight, seeing that he hits so well by night. God wot! by day
he

he might carry away one's whisker without one's feeling it."

"What dastard could bid him do this unmanly deed?" said sir William. "Some one of my very good friends, no doubt!"

"Who in their abundant love do wish thee well in heaven!" said Ralphe.

"It is fortunate it did not strike thee higher," said sir Roland; "one little inch, and thine hallercet* would have received it."

"And my neck would have as assuredly suffered. I should never have uttered another word for lord or lady. Who can the varlet be?"

"Daylight may shew him in his true colours," replied Ralphe. "A good arbalister he hath proved himself; an' we find him as good a man, my judgment is wider the mark than his bolt."

"He vowed his aim was a partridge," said sir Roland.

"That

* Hallercet, that part of the armour which fixes round the neck.

“ That bolt won’t tell,” continued Ralphe. “ He had better plead diligence, and swear that he was practising his art for the beneficial destruction of the king’s enemies, and that in the uncertain light, he mistook the knight’s *casque* for a *butt* !”

“ He must have watched our coming with a vast deal of patience,” said sir William, “ a most unwinking carl. At this unseasonable hour, one would have imagined he would have given up all hopes of seeing us, and have delayed the execution of his malicious intentions to some fitter opportunity.”

“ He could scarcely have tracked us hither,” said sir Roland. “ No : doubtless he was aware of the unguarded manner in which we set out this afternoon, and has awaited our return for many hours : but we have, thanks to Gervase, caught the knave right cleverly, and we shall peradventure draw from him such confessions, that will enable us to reap good satisfaction

tisfaction for the wound thou hast received—His life or the truth!”

“ And we will avenge us—But we approach the castle—take heed, on our arrival, that we do not cause unnecessary alarm. ’Twere better to conceal the whole truth from the ears of the fair queen and her demoiselles. Besides, I am aware that my wound is of much less importance than the first sudden stroke of the *quarrel* led me to believe. There is no danger, I am certain, although the pain of the bruise is by no means trifling. Thank my stars that it did not strike my sword-arm! it would have effectually disabled me from wielding pike or sword. Methinks, even now, it will be some time before the limb recovers sufficiently to bear the weight of my targe!”

The glittering mail of the slow-pacing guards, as they moved mechanically up and down the platform, were visible above the breast-high ramparts, in the bright rays

of the moon, and they immediately gave warning of the approach of the knights, whom they perceived afar off. Sir Roland winded the horn pendant at the castle gate, and the warder appeared at the wicket to answer the summons.—“ Who comes ?” demanded he.

“ Sir William de Lacy, and sir Roland, with his squire and a prisoner.—Give us instant admittance; the knight De Lacy is sorely wounded.”

“ The word ?” said the formal warder.

“ Stephen and merry England !”

“ Welcome !” replied the warder, and the gates were thrown wide to admit them.

Six vassals, bearing flambeaux, advanced to offer their services.

Sir Roland's first care was to see sir William safely lodged in his chamber; and a monk, who was sojourning at the castle, and said to possess some knowledge in leech-craft, was summoned to try his skill upon the wounded knight.

Having

Having performed this duty to his friend, sir Roland returned to the court, where a group of vassals, who had collected round Gervase and his prisoner, were talking loudly together.

CHAPTER X.
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THE moment that Gervase lifted the culprit from the horse, and put him on his legs, the vassals recognized him by the light of their torches ; and having learnt the crime of which he was accused, exclaimed, in the utmost surprise, mingled with a feeling of horror—" 'Tis Red Robert !"

" Thou know'st him then ?" cried sir Roland, not less astonished at their recognition.

" He is the baron de Lacy's chief arbalester," replied the warder.

" Indeed !" exclaimed sir Roland, his indignation aroused by this information. " Can it be possible the base villain hath aimed at the life of his lord's only son ? Oh, treachery most black and horrible !  
Accursed



Accursed be he who would imbrue his hands in the blood of his liege lord !”

“ I am innocent !” was the reiterated and only reply of the detected arbalister to every question put to him.

“ Thou shalt prove that by other means than thy bare word, or thou shalt swing on the first bough that will bear thee, on the coming morrow !” said sir Roland.

“ I am willing to be adjudged by the baron ; I am innocent, and he will do me justice,” replied the arbalister, doggedly, scowling at sir Roland, and apparently treating his interference with a contemptuous bravado.

The noise of their arrival had aroused the baron de Lacy, who hurriedly rushing into the court, with an affectation of extreme rage and grief, cried out—“ Have they killed the knight ? Awake the king ! Tell him his favourite is slain ! Alack ! unfortunate sir Roland, what treacherous hand hath done the bloody deed !”

“ Cease thy lamentations, good sir baron,”

ron," cried sir Roland, amazed at his exclamation, at the same time standing forth from the crowd, and approaching De Lacy—"Thy fears are groundless—sir Roland lives! and, thank Heaven, he is permitted to tell thee these glad tidings!"

"Hah! Lives!" cried Hubert de Lacy, breathing quickly, and gazing upon the knight, as if he were actually a spirit from the other world. For a moment he seemed staggered—confounded by the unexpected sight. "What lying tongue hath breathed these false tidings? Hast thou indeed escaped unharmed, my brave young knight?" continued the baron, in agitation, as if overcome by the sudden transition of his feelings.—"'Tis well—'tis well," shaking him heartily by the hand. "I feared me thou hadst fallen!"

"Nay, sir baron, I 'scaped unscathed," said sir Roland, adding seriously—"Would that thy son——"

"My son! Speak! What of him—what mishap?"

"A slight

“A slight bruise, of no material danger,” quickly replied sir Roland, wishing to relieve the father’s fears. “But we have caught the doer of this deed!”

“In truth?” cried De Lacy, with even more embarrassment than he had before evinced. “Where—where is he?”

“Safe in custody,” replied sir Roland; “and, I am grieved to say, he hath been recognized as one of thine own arbalisters!”

“Hah! Hath he confessed—anything?”

“Nothing.”

“Then let me look on him,” said De Lacy, and the crowd of vassals made way for his approach.

But when the arbalister’s eyes met his lord’s, far from shrinking beneath his gaze in terror, he seemed emboldened by his presence, and fearlessly answered him—  
“My lord, I am guiltless! Judge me. To thine ear alone I will disclose the cause of this unfortunate affair. Thou hast proved me faithful in thy service—thou

know'st my love and duty to thy house—that I would sooner shed my heart's blood than have done this deed. Wherein should it profit me?”

“Silence, thou artful and designing knave! I will not lend an ear to thy excuses. Do I not know thy skill—that thine aim is never-failing? Bear him hence to solitary confinement. Let no soul approach him.”

“My lord!” said the arbalester, with a meaning look at the baron, and turning deadly pale.

“No more!” said De Lacy. “Thou treacherous varlet——”

“Dost thou desert me then?” exclaimed Red Robert, struggling with those who were about to lead him away.—

“Hold! thou darest not cast me in bondage. Wilt thou murder me? My lord! take heed, or——”

“Gag the villain!” said the baron. “Let not his tongue utter another word. What! dare he add threats to his crime?

Shall

Shall he not have justice? Ay, to the very full we'll punish him."

His commands were promptly obeyed, and all the bold attempts of the arbalister to justify himself were rendered abortive.

"'Tis wondrous strange!" said sir Roland, when they had left the court-yard. "What think'st thou, Ralphe?"

"May we think?" asked the squire, cautiously looking around him.

"Assuredly."

"Ay—but aloud?"

"What is there to fear?"

"In sooth, sir knight," replied Ralphe, "I have seen much that I fear. My grannam liked not leeks—and why?—because she did not, and that is my wherefore that I do not like that baron. God mend me! but methinks he knows more of this prank of Red Robert's than any of us. Considering the outcry he made at first about your worship's supposed murder, he did not seem so very rejoiced at thy living appearance! Mark me an' he doth

not love himself better than thee. I read confusion in his face when thou didst step forward."

"Peace!" cried sir Roland, offended at suspicions which he believed so unfounded; yet aware that his squire had no other aim than his good, he added—"Let me hear no more of this. Thy zeal for me may peradventure make thee err. By me this language is forgiven—by others it may be esteemed treasonous; beware, therefore, that ye broach not these sentiments elsewhere."

"No one shall see a glimmer of the light within me," replied Ralphe; "the truth shall lie hid like a candle under a firkin. Verily, I shall be right glad to hear this Red Robert, as they call him, say his say aloud."

Upon quitting the court-yard, Hubert de Lacy had immediately repaired to the chamber of his son. Sir William was lying stretched at full length upon his couch; the beams of a small lamp suspended



ded from the lofty roof shone full upon his face, which was pale and involuntarily contracted by the pain and anguish of his bruised shoulder. The monk had bled him, and applied a miraculous balsam to the part. He was alone when the baron entered, and unclosed his eyes as he approached him.

“Is the wound serious? what saith the monk?” demanded the baron.

“He treats it lightly—says there is more pain than danger. Curse on the hand that shot the bolt. Hast thou seen the carl?”

“I have, and curse him too for an ar-rant fool.”

“A fool! a knave! or some knave’s tool!” replied sir William.

“The tool of the knave that stands before thee!” answered De Lacy, coolly.

“Thee?”

“Hush!”

“I am surprised!”

“Let thy wonder be mute, or speak low.

low. I will disperse the mysterious darkness in which this affair is at present enveloped."

"Quick—mine ears are eager for the tale!"

"When I inform thee it was Red Robert's quarrel wounded thee, thou may'st readily divine for whom it was intended."

"I see it all."

"After thy departure, I bethought me of this bold stratagem to rid us quietly of a rival; and, knowing Red Robert's skill, promised him a rich reward to do the deed. My plan hath failed. But if this youth beareth not a charmed life, he shall not touch the shores of France. My only fear now is in the confession of the arbalister. He is an useful villain, and I fain would save him, but dare not; therefore must I promptly silence him to save myself. The king will of course be curious to know the particulars of this seeming strange affair, and in his close and shrewd investigation, penetrate too far,

far, and in the kind attempt to do us right, may wrong us wofully. Red Robert too is desperate, and the prospect of preserving his own life will render him reckless of our fame."

"By the mass, it will be so! Seek him without delay. Day will soon break, and the king be stirring. The least delay may create confusion, and peradventure raise such suspicions in the breasts of the king and sir Roland, that may keep them on the alert, and for ever preclude any future attempts to crush this viper in our path."

"I'll forthwith go and school him," replied De Lacy; and immediately rising, quitted the chamber, to visit the prisoner, the unfortunate tool of his villany.

Unattended, he entered the narrow cell, or dungeon, wherein the warder had cast the arbalister. The glimmering lamp De Lacy bore in his hand showed him his devoted vassal. The bandage had been taken from his mouth, but his hands  
were

were still fast bound behind him with strong cords.

He was pacing up and down, pondering on the dreadful uncertainty of his fate, when the appearance of his lord, alone too, made him recoil with horror; and when he saw him cautiously close the door after him, his heart died within him with apprehension, for well he knew how little mercy he had to expect from the hands of the heartless De Lacy, and he looked upon this secret and solitary visit as the awful harbinger of his doom. Resistance on his part was vain, unarmed and bound as he was; and from the farthest extremity of his dungeon, he fixed his glaring eyes upon the baron, watching his movements in breathless terror.

He was a man somewhat below the middling stature, with small but extremely well-made and muscular limbs; his shoulders broad and brawny, exhibiting more strength than beauty in their proportions; nor were his features of a very prepossessing

sing cast, being flat and broad, while the very small portion of his face which was not covered by the bushy deep-red hair of his beard and whiskers, was strongly freckled. But if his person were not formed in the mould of beauty, his wonderful skill in the use of the arbalist, or cross-bow, won him the admiration of all; the feats he performed were almost incredible, and his unerring aim was the theme and the envy of his fellows.

When Hubert de Lacy had engaged him to do the ruthless deed (the failure of which had brought him into such peril), he placed the utmost reliance on his infallibility in the execution of it; he felt secure in the death of his rival; but now disappointment, rage, and fear, alternately operated upon his exasperated feelings, and urged him to act both with decision and dispatch. He approached the trembling vassal, and holding the lamp to his face, read the terror of his soul in every quivering

quivering feature.—“ Robert,” cried he, “ hear me !”

“ In fear, dread lord, I listen,” replied the arbalister.

“ The missing of thy mark is a thing that sorely vexeth me ; but that was pardonable”—the vassal’s countenance brightened at this soothing language—“ ’twas a mischance,” continued the baron, “ that might have hereafter been amended.”

“ True, true, my lord,” eagerly replied Red Robert; and wishing to excuse his fault—“ the moment I let fly the bolt, the young knight stooped, and the cursed quarrel struck sir William. Satan guided that bolt !”

“ No matter ; I say ’twas pardonable. What an arbalister could do, I know thou would’st,” rejoined De Lacy ; “ and all would have been right well even now, had’st thou but securely escaped unmarked.”

“ No mortal eye or hand could have traced or caught me, “ said the arbalister,  
“ had



“ had it not been for that devil incarnate, who dropped from a tree upon me, and threw me down.”

“ Who mean'st thou ?”

“ The Black Boy.”

“ A curse on him ! 'tis not the first I owe for his interference—I've marked him ! But to our present business—to that which most concerns us both.”

“ Speak on, my lord ; my very soul is listening.”

“ Thy name, and the crime of which thou art guiltless, is the theme of every tongue ; all waking within the castle know the tale ; many hours cannot elapse before it reaches the king's ears : he is just ; but he is merciful, and thou wottest I have great favour with him : be discreet then, follow my counsel in every particular, and thou art safe. Thou wilt be arraigned on the morrow.”

“ Must this be ?”

“ It cannot be avoided.”

“ Hast

“Hast thou not power to set me free, and let me fly far from hence?”

“Such conduct would create suspicion,” replied De Lacy. “We must perforce undergo a mock trial, a mere ceremony, to satisfy the punctilious king and those around him. What hast thou to fear?—I shall be nigh, and being therein most concerned, a single word from me shall free thee from all fears and apprehensions.”

“Must I then plead guilty?”

“Assuredly.”

“And what excuse for such a flagrant act?”

“Plead some pique: thou art known to be hasty and vengeful; avow that sir William flouted and struck thee wrongfully, and in the heat of anger thou did'st rashly make a vow to avenge thee, by wounding him slightly.”

“Will this excuse the deed?”

“It shall—it must—there is no other mode whereby thou hast the chance of escaping.

escaping. Beware! swerve not from my instructions, if thou dost value life."

"I will be bold," said Red Robert, in a tone more of hopelessness than bravery; while, with a look of mingled distrust and supplication, he added, "Bethink ye, my lord; I am thy servitor—let me not fall. Whate'er my faults may be, I have been true to thee and thine. My life is in thine hands."

"Pshaw! fear nothing," said Hubert de Lacy, and snatching up the lamp, he hurried from the dungeon.

Again he sought the chamber of his wounded son, to communicate to him the result of his interview with the arbalister.

"How seems he?" demanded sir William.

"Half dead already!" replied De Lacy. "I shall marvel if he live 'till morning. Fear hath unstrung his nerves."

"'Twould have been well if that half-witted fool had throttled him."

"Would that he had!" replied the selfish

fish De Lacy ; “ it would have spared a world of trouble : mine honour and fair name are now in his keeping : but I have put his own sentence in his mouth ; if he hath life enow to speak it, he dies, and seals our safety by his death.”

“ And for what wait ye now, my lord ?”

“ The king.”

“ He must be stirring.”

“ Think’st thou so ? ay, true, the morning is older than I thought. I’ll go meet him as he comes forth, and tell my ready tale.” Hereupon he sought the king’s chamber, whom he opportunely met, being just arisen.

With little ceremony, which his dissembled rage and consternation well excused, he recounted, in a hurried strain, the grievances that worked upon his feelings, in which the astonished king most cordially sympathized, inveighing bitterly against the treachery of the unfortunate and misrepresented arbalister.

He

He immediately hastened to the couch of sir William, to condole with him upon his misfortune ; and here again the false tale was told, while the cunning De Lacy supported his part with so much apparent truth, that Stephen was completely duped and misled by his rage and his misrepresentations.

“ I would have sacrificed the false knave on the spot,” cried De Lacy, vehemently, “ and avenged my son, but respect for your grace held back my trembling hand (trembling with wrath) from executing what justice so strenuously demanded !”

“ ’Twas well !” replied Stephen ; “ it would have been a death too honourable to have died beneath the hand of such a noble executioner. ’Tis a vile dog that bites the hand of its feeder. Go, bid the hangman do his office presently ! Let not the sun shine on so base a villain ! he hath lived too long already—let him hang !”

The overjoyed and heartless De Lacy  
was

was not slow to obey the royal mandate, so consonant with his own wishes. He pressed on the unjust execution; and in a few minutes his betrayed and trusting minion was led forth; and ere he was aware of the king's decree, or could murmur a prayer for the safety of his soul, he was hurried into eternity.



CHAPTER XI.  
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“ALACK and alack! here’s a sight for a man’s waking eyes!” exclaimed Ralph, as he looked forth from the small turret window which gave light to the chamber he and sir Roland occupied.

“What seest thou so strange?” demanded the knight.

“Only a man dangling ’twixt heaven and earth, like another vile dog!”

“What say’st thou?”

“They’ve hanged, sir knight, Red Robert the arbalister! By the mass, but this is quick work! a gagging with a vengeance! I would fain have heard his defence. They should have suspended their judgment—and not the man.”

“Is it possible!” cried sir Roland, looking from the window, and beholding De Lacy’s

Lacy's victim with a feeling of commiseration ; " there hath indeed been much unseemly haste in this affair. Did sir William know of this ? doubtless no ; but the exasperated feelings of the father could not brook the delay of his vengeance."

" Feelings !" repeated Ralphe ; " an' that old baron hath the feeling of a flea, I'm a knave, a shallow-brained squire, with no more reflection in me than a shattered mirror. Had he any fellow-feeling, he would have felt for that fellow, and granted him the grace of a hearing. Poor devil ! what a pass hath his skill brought him to ! what a dishonourable exaltation ! Had he been as deep *red* (as his whiskers) in the true-telling stars, he would never have fallen out with his master—for, verily, a fatal *quarrel* hath brought him to an untimely end."

" Methinks thou judgest the baron harshly," said sir Roland, " perchance unjustly ; we know not the cause of his
strange

strange conduct—for strange in truth it was last night.”

“ My judgment, your worship, may not be deeper than a trencher, nor can I trace the source of every little spring that sets my tongue in motion,” replied Ralphe; “ but if this same baron, Red Robert’s lord, be thy friend, Heaven befriend thee likewise, for thou wilt need it !”

“ A word or two in explanation of what hath transpired, may put to flight the trifling doubts I entertain, and the seeming certainties which have won so much upon thee,” rejoined sir Roland. “ I’ll seek sir William, and presently learn the tidings of Red Robert’s crime.”

“ Those fatal tidings, that have wrought this fatal *noose* !” said Ralphe.

To sir Roland the same tale was rehearsed, which raised the king’s indignation, and caused him, happily for De Lacy, to act with such indecorous and unjust haste. And now their feigned indignation being amply satisfied by the

vengeance they had wreaked upon the culprit's head, and their fears set at rest, they so well dissembled their regret at the loss of such an able and skilful arbaster, that sir Roland was completely hoodwinked by their complaints, and inwardly confessed that he had wronged them by his suspicions.

The intelligence soon spread throughout the castle, and reached the ears of the queen and her ladies, who were presently beside the couch of the wounded knight. Avis was overwhelmed with grief at her lover's misfortune; and the affectionate Myriol sympathized with her, soothing her with all the gentle persuasiveness of her nature, calming her fears by her assurance that no immediate danger threatened sir William.

Meanwhile sir Roland paid every attention to his friend; and the skill of the monk who attended him speedily relieved him from pain, restoring him to his friends again

again in the course of seven or eight days.

During the interval of sir William's confinement, however, the young knight enjoyed the enviable opportunity of being often alone in the company of the ladies, and improving the favour he had won on his first introduction. With his own natural ability and personal endowments, aided by such elegant society, he soon became one of the most accomplished and gallant knights that paraded about the court. His exterior too, in a very short period, underwent a considerable transformation; from the plain dressed, careless, yet handsome knight, he burst forth into the very opposite extreme of costly elegance. The taste and colour of his garments were lauded, and imitated by the whole fraternity, who unanimously yielded him precedence on every occasion; for they honoured his superior prowess no less than they admired the refinement of his taste in less material points.

The baron and his son watched with anxiety the gradual development of sir Roland's character, foreseeing that the rising of such a brilliant star would in a short time entirely eclipse their lesser glory. Plan after plan, and various plots were laid, but they either failed in the execution, or were never attempted for want of proper opportunity. The knight's company was too much courted ever to find him alone; and the discerning De Lacy saw, with no little apprehension, that Ralphe, his faithful and devoted squire, watched his very words, as well as actions, with the most distrustful suspicion, and had already taken the liberty, under cover of a piquant joke, to let him know that he had discovered his real character, and that his envy or enmity towards his honoured master was by no means a secret to him, whatever it might be to the generous and unsuspecting knight.

Sir Roland had indeed at first deemed De Lacy's conduct very mysterious, but, finding

finding no real foundation for his doubts, he was not disposed to regard him in any otherwise than a brave knight and a sincere friend; and the baron's speciousness strengthened his conviction, that all was just and honourable. Besides, the pleasing occupation of his time and thoughts by the ladies, left no space for the intrusion of any dreary doubts or reflections to disturb his peace. Confidence followed the favour he enjoyed, and overcame the diffidence he experienced, when first his heart avowed its predilection for the beautiful Myriol. But however kindly that fair lady received him, he was aware that he could not construe any one single word or action by any other term than mere courtesy, for which he ever found a parallel in the conduct of the charming Avis. He sought in vain for an opportunity of finding Myriol alone; she never stirred without a friend, whom she accustomed herself to look up to, as one superior in strength, for succour and support.

She was sprightly in her company, but her sensitive nature would have shrunk abashed from the attentions of the young and handsome sir Roland, without the countenance of the lively Avis, who was to her as the beautiful trellis around which entwines the delicate and fragile honeysuckle. That he was not totally indifferent to her, he was convinced, by her not avoiding, but rather affecting his company; and the mere esteem of such a lovely creature was flattering; but the ambition of sir Roland demanded a dearer sentiment than this, and he made a vow to deserve, though he might despair of ever obtaining her affection. In her manners towards him, there was always a partial constraint, which he ascribed to its proper source—her virgin modesty; but whenever De Lacy joined them, which was frequently the case, he observed, with a feeling of jealousy, that her behaviour towards that elegant courtier was far less restrained; and the superiority of his years
could

could alone plead in his behalf, or excuse the conduct of Myriol.

On the recovery of sir William, sir Roland was cheered by the prospect of speaking alone to the lady of his affections, and essayed every pardonable stratagem to separate the two friends.

Avis soon became aware of his intentions, and wilfully protracted the knight's misery with all the cruelty of coquetry, at the same time playing upon his irritable feelings with all the piquant artillery of her satirical wit.

It was the evening before the embarkation of the king for Normandy, that the knights and the ladies were walking in the adjacent park, rendered less merry than they were wont to be, by the melancholy prospect of so early a separation. Avis was much depressed, and sympathizing with the feelings of sir Roland, she almost imperceptibly withdrew with sir William de Lacy, leaving sir Roland and Myriol together.

The knight observed the manœuvre, and his heart was in ecstasies; while Myriol almost as soon perceiving that they were alone, blushed deeply, and begged sir Roland to hasten and join their friends, who had so suddenly slipped away.

“And wherefore, lady,” said sir Roland, “wouldst thou be so unkind as to interrupt their parting moments? What a many injunctions hath the lady Avis to impose—what promises and vows to make! None but those who truly love can tell the anguish of separation.”

“Nay, I was thoughtless in expressing such a wish,” replied Myriol. “What little time they have, let them enjoy it. I would not, for the world, stand betwixt the twain, to arrest the interchange of sigh or look. But prithee, sir Roland, let us return to the castle.”

“Fair lady,” replied sir Roland, “my duty and not my will consents. And is it then in the society of thy friend alone that I may enjoy the pleasure of thine?

Must

Must I thank her for the honour of seeing and conversing with thee? If so, how vast is the debt I owe her!"

"Not so, indeed, sir Roland," answered Myriol, confused by the serious tone in which he spoke; "I can appreciate true worth. I would not have thee suppose I wish either to avoid or to offend thee."

"Then hold me not presumptive, sweet lady, if I detain thee here," continued sir Roland. "A few hours hence, and I shall be borne far, far from thee, on the dark bosom of the ocean. But whithersoever fortune leads me, I can never forget the happy days I have passed in this blissful retreat—the happiest of my life! And how blessed should I be, if I dared to imagine, that one so humble as I should ever be honoured in the remembrance of the lady Myriol!"

"Then thereof be well assured," replied Myriol, who trembled while he made this declaration; "I must ever hold in grate-

ful remembrance one who so bravely rescued me from death !”

“ And remembering likewise the lowly vassal that I then appeared,” said sir Roland, “ wilt think me too bold and soaring, when I crave at thine hands some token (such as ladies may without censure bestow on humble knights), which may arm me, as a gifted talisman, with courage and perseverance, in every difficulty that may arise to arrest me in my progress to fame and honour? Canst thou, lady, forgetting what I *was*, remember only what I *am*, and grant me this boon?”

“ Thou dost me wrong, to suspect me capable of entertaining such ungenerous feelings,” answered Myriol. “ And to assure thee, sir Roland, how unmerited are thy suspicions, and how groundless thy fears, I must inform thee, that I have, unasked, embroidered thee a scarf, to deck thee withal, that on thy departure thou mayest not appear less honoured than thy
brother

brother knights, who wear their ladies' gifts in all the pride of favoured love."

"A thousand and a thousand thanks!" cried the elated knight, "for these most precious words: and though thy scarf be but the gift of gratitude, I'll bear it with as much heartfelt pride as those that are girded with the gifts of true love. The lady Myriol's esteem is worthier than the love of other dames!"

No pen can describe the exquisite feelings that filled the joyful heart of sir Roland, as, with that respect which pure affection inspires, he gently raised the fair white trembling heart of Myriol, and pressed it to his lips.

A crimson glow suffused her snowy neck and fair complexion, while her lovely blue eyes were downcast, in the most delightful confusion.

Sir Roland felt the deliciousness of that moment of unbroken silence. His throbbing heart swelled within his manly breast, and prevented the utterance of his bliss.

He was conscious that he was not, could not, be indifferent to the all-lovely and blushing creature in whose presence he stood entranced. Again and again he impressed her unresisting hand with glowing kisses; and in the extravagance of his passion, losing sight of that difference of rank which had kept him so long sighing aloof in despair, and encouraged by the apparently reciprocal sentiments of Myriol, he dropped on one knee, and still holding her hand in his, confessed the ardour of the flame her beauty had inspired, and vowed to devote his life to her service.

This bold declaration had the effect of arousing the trembling and taciturn Myriol, who, withdrawing her hand, and summoning up all her pride to her aid, said, with as much firmness as her agitation would permit her to assume—"Sir knight, presume not too far upon my favour. Teach me not to forget the esteem
I bear

I bear thee. Lead me hence. Let us return to the castle, or rejoin our friends."

This sudden and unexpected change which his declaration had worked, operated upon the knight's fervid feelings with more force than the ill-concealed tenderness of Myriol could have wished; and when she again looked upon his pale countenance, which had erst glowed with such warmth, and read, in that index of the heart and mind, the grief she had inspired by her haughtiness, all the gentleness of the woman returned; she forgot her anger, and only thought how she could best heal the wound she had so unkindly inflicted on so true a heart.

"Oh, lady," cried he, "though I have erred, frown not upon me, for I cannot survive thine anger. Heaven hath made thee beautiful; be as just then as thou art superior to the rest of thy sex, and destroy not one, though lowly and humble he be, because his heart hath dared to pour forth the inspirations of thy loveliness.

ness. Blame not thy willing slave because he avows his bondage. Be merciful; command me to do thy bidding—to quit thy sight for ever—to fly from that presence which is sunshine to my soul; bid me die, or bid me do aught that may expiate the offence I have committed; I can do any thing but cease to love thee!”

“ Arise, sir Roland—I beseech ye, arise,” said Myriol; “ I cannot, must not listen to this language.”

“ Say but one word, lady; can any penance win pardon for this offence?”

“ In thy silence it shall be forgotten.”

“ And the offender too?” demanded sir Roland.

“ He shall be remembered——”

“ With scorn and contumely for his ambition!”

“ Pronounce not thine own doom,” said Myriol, who had, in some measure, regained her self-possession; “ leave that to me. I will judge thee justly, but not rigorously.”

“ In

“ In that kind assurance,” replied sir Roland, “ I will live, and earnestly endeavour, by my future conduct, to regain the favour, which I fear me I have almost irretrievably lost.”

Although this was unanswered by Myriol, who wished not to prolong the conversation, sir Roland had sufficient penetration to discover that his pardon was neither hopeless nor far distant, nor even his ambitious views entirely without hope, and he rather attributed her coldness, and apparent pride, to her maiden modesty, than any insensibility of the heart. But he dared not further press his suit on this occasion; and even had he been so disposed, it was rendered impracticable by the intrusion of Hubert de Lacy, who evinced a considerable degree of surprise on finding sir Roland and Myriol together. —“ Ha !” exclaimed the baron—“ Good even to the fair lady Myriol—and to thee, fair sir, to whom it needs must prove so, seeing the goodly company thou dost affect.

fect. Marry, but 'tis strange good fortune, sir knight, to find this solitary rose. Whither hath fled the other of the twain, that are wont to grow so beautifully together?"

"Avis mean'st thou?" said Myriol, somewhat embarrassed by the baron's discovering her in this awkward situation; "in good sooth, I did not part with her, sir baron, but she with me, induced thereto by thine own gallant son."

"So pretty an excuse, from two such pretty lips, never did I hear. 'Tis well! the air of the court hath infected thee, I fear, with coquetry. We soon shall find the 'meek-eyed dove' a turtle-dove; these shady and retired groves are well suited to the delights of billing and cooing!"

The consciousness of the scene that she had taken part in with sir Roland, caused her to blush deeply at this bold insinuation. The knight, however, seeing her confusion, rallied his spirits, and replied quickly to the baron—"Thou'rt merry,
and

and light of heart, sir baron; prithee comest thou too hither on an errand of gallantry? Peradventure on this very spot the fair lady comes; is it so? Bid us hence; for, by the mass, I would not intercept a sigh, dispatched by a lover to his mistress's heart, for all the stars that shine above us!—Come, lady, e'en now, perchance, the damsel stays within ear-shot, trembling like a frightened fawn, while we are discoursing so unconcernedly; let us hence quickly."

De Lacy smiled at this rattling reply of the knight, but he was too well versed in the human heart to be deceived by the pretended unconcern of sir Roland; there was, notwithstanding his endeavour to conceal it, a trepidation, a nervousness in his speech and manner, which plainly convinced the baron that the conversation of the young couple had embraced, if it had not been confined to, the interesting topic of love.

Fortunately for Myriol, sir William
de

de Lacy and Avis joined them at this moment, and De Lacy appeared to forget the subject of his raillery in the general conversation which ensued; and Myriol, quitting sir Roland, who purposely entered into conversation with Avis, put her arm within the baron's, and they all proceeded towards the castle.

The following morning, at an early hour, the barons, knights, and men of war, who were selected to have the honour of accompanying their sovereign, were all in readiness, with their complement of squires, arms, and baggage. The queen, and a number of ladies, were assembled in the hall, to bid adieu, and wish success to the victorious arms of Stephen and his train.

Armed at all points, and supported on either side by the two young knights, sir Roland and sir William de Lacy, the king entered the hall, amid the acclamations of all his liege and loving subjects. He approached Matilda, who, receiving a
white

white scarf embroidered with golden lions, from one of her maidens, presented it to Stephen, with these words — “Mighty king, may conquest crown thee! Be bold and fearless, and remember the orisons of thy queen and thy subjects are with thee. Thou livest in their hearts; and thine enemies shall fall beneath thy glaive—farewell!”

The king arose from the kneeling posture in which he had received the scarf, and pressing Matilda’s hand to his lips, bowed to the ladies and retired, while the martial music of the brazen trumpets filled the hall.

Sir William de Lacy next received a similar favour from the hands of Avis; and was not a little astonished when he beheld his rival and brother-in-arms, sir Roland, bending his head beneath the lily hands of Myriol, who adorned him with the gay scarf her own fingers had embroidered with superior skill and admirable taste. Hubert de Lacy, courtier as he was,

was, could not conceal his chagrin at the enviable honour bestowed on the young and aspiring knight, who was equally admired by the queen and her ladies, and envied by all the knights; for the honour of wearing the favour of so transcendant a beauty as Myriol, was indeed worthy of inspiring the humblest heart with pride. On this occasion too, when she stepped forward amid the gaze of so many, glowing with the blushing diffidence of her retiring nature, her beauty appeared more than usually radiant, although her graceful figure was arrayed in the simplest garb that genuine taste could invent.

Avis rallied her on her predilection, but Myriol felt her raillery as a mere nothing, compared with the task she had undergone in subjecting herself to the ardent looks and admiration of the whole court; nor would she ever have summoned up sufficient resolution, whatever her inclination might have prompted, had not the queen

queen secretly commanded obedience to her wishes in this instance.

Stephen was no less gratified than surprised at this unexpected pleasure, which the conduct of Myriol towards his favourite gave him; and to all but Hubert de Lacy, and his son and prototype sir William, all was gladness and rejoicing on the memorable morning of their departure.

CHAPTER XII.



THE heavens were of a dark and cloudless blue, spangled with millions of twinkling stars, but the winds blew a strong gale, and the armed bark that bore Stephen and his knights rolled majestically over the black billows of the wide expansive sea. The loud hoarse voices of the commanders, issuing their orders to the active mariners, were alone heard amidst the roaring of the waters, the whistling of the night winds, and the splashing of the white fringed waves, as they perpetually arose and pursued the vessel, momentarily breaking over her, and throwing up a shower of snowy sparkling spray; but the wind that filled the swelling canvas was favourable, and drove them gallantly on their destined course, and was sufficiently

ciently strong to render the sea beautifully picturesque, without the apprehension of any danger commingling with the admiration of the imposing scene to mar their pleasure.

A convenient seat was lashed to the mainmast, for the accommodation of Stephen, who spent the better part of the night in the contemplation of the turbulent waters; while De Lacy leaned on the chair of his prince, and amused him with his conversation, always pleasing, always witty, and light and buoyant, as if no worldly cares had ever pressed upon him.

Sir Roland was conversing with the master of the bark, on the management of his vessel, and viewing all the quick mechanical manœuvres of the men with curiosity and wonder.

Sir William was pacing the deck, in company with another young knight, recounting their adventures and achievements in love and war, and both heartily wishing

wishing for the moment when they should set foot in Normandy, which promised an ample field for the display of their skill and courage, when the vessel suddenly heeling, threw sir William out of his balance, and reeling a few steps, he was precipitated into the sea.

The king's eyes witnessed the appalling accident, and starting up, cried out fearfully to the crew to aid the knight; while De Lacy called wildly on his son's name, and promised half his fortune to the daring hand that would snatch him from a watery grave.

All on board heard the frantic cry of the agonized father, but none were found ready to risk their life for fortune. A moment's hesitation, and all hope would be lost—the king, the baron, and the knights, rushed to the quarter from whence he had fallen—all was hurry and confusion.

“See! see!” cried the king, in breathless anxiety—“he rises—I see his drenched
ed

ed white plume above the waters: he is astern—we have passed—put back the bark !”

But no sooner had he appeared above the waves, and the king's quick eye had marked him, than another form became visible, swimming towards him, and beating the waves with a vigorous arm. By a lucky chance the swimmer grasped sir William's arm, who, having sunk again, arose beside him. Encouraged by this timely succour, the failing heart of the young knight received new life, and although unfortunately but a very indifferent swimmer, this aid, and his own renewed exertions, kept himself and preserver above water. But the strength of the sea, and the darkness of the night, were equally against them; and not a soul on board but prayed for their preservation from their perilous, and almost hopeless situation. But like Canute of old, Stephen could not command the waves; and notwithstanding the best endeavours of

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the mariners, and the quickness with which he put her about, the two swimmers were presently lost among the billows!

Every heart sickened at the awful scene which had passed before their eyes, and sympathized with the afflicted father. But Hubert de Lacy uttered no complaint; with clasped hands he continued to gaze in despondency upon the mighty waves that had deprived him of his son, and swallowed up all his hopes. All respected his grief, and for awhile he was uninterrupted; but when the king addressed him in a soothing manner, and pressed him to retire to his cabin, he turned round and regarded him with an unmeaning stare, as if all speech and sense were wrapped up in one sad engrossing thought.

The king turned away from his gaze, while his blood ran chill with the appalling idea that the loss of his son had bereaved the baron of his reason. He commanded them to lead him away, and he
was

was instantly obeyed without a murmur, or the least resistance on the part of De Lacy. He hoped repose might calm him ; and immediately quitting the deck, his grace also sought, in the retirement of his cabin, some relief from the effects of the lamentable occurrence which had caused such an universal agitation.

Early on the following morning it was announced to Stephen that they had reached their destination.

“ So soon ? ” cried he.

“ ’Tis true, your grace,” replied the commander. “ Thanks be to Him who gave us a fair wind and a clear sky. Four barks have already arrived before us, and are now lying at anchor. Seven more are hove in sight, and are now running fast for the port.”

“ Let us land then without farther delay,” said the king. “ Hast thou tidings of De Lacy ?—is he stirring ? We have not had intelligence these last two hours

K 2 past :

past: weary of watching, we have slept soundly, but awoke unrefreshed."

"He is even now walking the deck, resting on the arm of a young knight," replied the commander; "his face lowry and dark as a stormy sky. He speaks little, but seems resigned as Christian can be under such an awful stroke!"

"Whom said'st thou did he walk withal?—is't sir Roland?"

"I wot not, your grace."

"Sir Aymer," said the king, addressing a young knight, who just then entered the presence, "bid sir Roland hither quickly; we would exchange a word with him relative to our worthy friend, the now childless De Lacy."

"Pardon me, your grace, that I do bring thee ill-favoured tidings of the right valiant knight thou namest; he hath been missed since yesternight; even now strict search hath been made, and all the complement of men are full and complete; we lack but him; and he, the most favoured

voured of your knights, we fear is lost—lost in the attempt to rescue sir William, in a watery grave, which he hath divided with him. In truth, it is proved beyond a doubt, that 'twas sir Roland who so boldly adventured, and sacrificed his life to friendship !”

“ Ill-omened tale !” exclaimed the king, clasping his hands together, “ to be thus deprived of two of our noblest youths, and by that deprivation too, lose perchance the counsel of an elder—not less brave than they, but whose courage and wisdom are alike matured by time and choice experience. Even at the onset of this our enterprise, stern, unrelenting fate, with iron hand, snatches away our dearest friends, and frowns us back !” He covered his face with both hands, and remained silent for the space of a minute ; then rising more composed, gave orders for immediately landing.—“ The victorious soldier needs must be bold,” said he ; “ but he is only truly courageous who dares to fight

when the field's against him, and he contends with adverse fortune. Away! we long to set our foot on firm and faithful land once more; the sea is treacherous."

Hubert de Lacy approached the king when he came on deck, and received his heartfelt condolence, with respectful but apathetic silence. The smiling courtier smiled no more, for affliction pressed heavily on his heart, and bowed his spirit down.

The king and his train were scarcely landed, when the seven vessels the commander had observed, rode safely into port, and casting anchor, disembarked their warlike companies. The loud and hearty cheers of the mariners fell harshly on the ears of Stephen and the baron; there was no joyful echo in their grieving hearts.

Sir Roland's honest squire, Ralphe, was not on board the same vessel with his master, or his loss would not have passed so long unnoticed, even in the confusion and
bustle

bustle which reigned in the bark; and when the king and his train came ashore, he watched anxiously till the last boat was landed, when not perceiving the knight among the arrivals, he walked up to the commander, who was about to return—"Prithee, captain," said he, "hast thou unshipped all thy cargo?"

"Yea—all," replied the commander.

"Then I vow I have not clapped mine eyes either on sir Roland or sir William de Lacy!"

The king overheard the squire's inquiries, and turned towards Hubert de Lacy, who was standing beside him, and seemingly, by the mournful expression of his countenance, informing him of sir Roland's devotedness to his son. But he was presently startled by the voice of Ralphe, who rushed past him, crying out—"By the mass! here comes my master and sir William, arm in arm, and as pale as corpses!"

"What? what!" exclaimed the king,

his eyes glancing in the direction in which the squire ran. "By God's birth!" added he, exultingly, "the knave speaks truth. They live—they live!—De Lacy, arouse thee—thy son is arisen from the deep!"

The appearance of the two young knights created a general and joyful cry among those who had mourned their supposed loss; and all wondering at their miraculous preservation, quickly followed De Lacy, who, the moment he perceived sir William, rushed wildly towards him, and received him in his arms.

Sir Roland respectfully approached the king, who shook him heartily by the hand.

"By what miracle do we again behold ye?" said the king: "what necromantic art hath summoned thee from the caverns of the dead? 'Tis beyond comprehension wonderful to behold ye, that we have mourned as lost, so suddenly appear, like pale spectres of yourselves, before us. Speak! if thy tongue be not stricken dumb, like those
those

those of these wonderers who gape so open-mouthed upon thee, ready to devour thy words, as if thou wert in reality some messenger from the court of death."

"Thank Heaven," replied sir Roland, in his ordinary lively tone, "neither life nor speech are yet extinct; though, God wot, both sir William and I struggled hard to keep life in us, for we were bandied about like two corks in a wash-tub, and had much difficulty to keep our beards above water; and when we lost sight of the bark, by the rolling, sinking, and rising of the billow, our hearts sunk too, though we still paddled and blowed like porpoises. Every minute was an age; and in a few more, we should have bid adieu to the bright stars above us, when, providentially, one of the barks in company came close upon us. We were more dead than alive; and though the sight cheered us, we could not utter a word, for our tongues clove to the roofs of our mouths; and we should even then have inevitably
K 5 perished,

perished, had not I observed, and suddenly seized, a loose rope that was hanging astern. We both clung to this—we felt that we were nearer life, and for some time we were dragged along, with the pleasant and certain prospect of a speedy deliverance, either by being observed by those on board, or having our brains dashed out against the vessel. At last, recovering our voices, we bawled out as lustily as we were able, to the no little amazement and terror of the watch, who verily believed that he heard the cries of some horrible sea-monster, prowling about the vessel for prey, when one, bolder than his fellows, summoned up sufficient courage to take a survey of us; and hearing us answer in his vernacular, and praying for speedy help, like Christians in jeopardy, he spoke to the master, who very charitably ordered us to be hauled on board. He only, who hath been in the very jaws of death, and as suddenly extricated therefrom as we were, can imagine what we experienced. But
joy

joy and weakness overcame us, and we fell as limp and as senseless as two flat fish on the deck: and it is not above an hour or so that we returned to a sense of our own existence; and here we come, in spite of wind and water, like true and loyal knights, to greet your grace with all good wishes on your safe landing. Circumstances must plead the tardiness of our appearance, and excuse the pickled condition in which we approach your grace."

"In sooth, sir Roland, Fortune guides and guards thee with most especial favour: the brave deserve her smiles," replied the king. "Sir William and we all do owe thee much. This occurrence hath but more firmly knit the bonds of friendship which held ye to each other. Go on—and ever united in the field, as ye have together struggled against the waters, oppose the foe; two such arms, prompted by two such hearts, must needs be invincible! Sir William, we do embrace thee; and in having lost thee, only feel how much we

love thee.—De Lacy,” added he, addressing the baron, “this knight doth well deserve to hold a share in that heart (I know thy predilection for him) which his courage hath been the happy means of filling with unbounded pleasure—that heart, De Lacy, wherein all was lately gloomy desolation!”

Hubert de Lacy embraced sir Roland; but although he felt grateful for the restoration of his beloved and only son, the force of his gratitude could not overcome his repugnance to the knight, whose virtues indeed were his only crime in the eyes of the selfish De Lacy. He embraced him, but he still regarded him as an enemy; and all the better feelings of the man were overcome by the ambitious sentiments of the courtier; and he cursed his unpropitious fate, that thrust upon him this great obligation to sir Roland.

It cannot be supposed that sir William, even participating as he had done in the rancorous hatred of his father, could possibly

sibly entertain any other sentiment than gratitude for the man who had so voluntarily risked his life for his preservation. However interest or envy might have swayed him heretofore, he could not now regard him in any other light than a most true and generous friend, more worthy of emulation than envy. To confess this change in his sentiments to De Lacy, would have caused an ebullition of ungovernable rage, which would probably have overwhelmed him in its course. He therefore prudently remained silent.

But Hubert de Lacy was not to be deceived by appearances; his penetration went beyond that delusive surface—that mask—which the most part of mankind contemplate as the reality. With profound regret he discovered the movements of generosity and gratitude in sir William's mind; but he was well aware, to suppress them at this juncture would be a hopeless undertaking, and he resolved not to appear to observe what he firmly relied on
time

time and his insinuations to eradicate ; and in consequence of this politic resolve, he received sir Roland with his usual duplicity, shewing him every demonstration of friendship. Ralphe was the only one who regarded him with suspicion, or at least the only one who had honesty or boldness enough openly to express his opinion of so great a man, and he watched every word and motion with the most unwearying vigilance.

From the first moment sir Roland had raised him to the honourable post of his body esquire, Ralphe had begun to entertain for him the most heartfelt respect and honour ; and the knight's frank and generous disposition, which every day exhibited him in a fairer light, only tended to strengthen his determination to serve him with fidelity and truth. He found that his humour was by no means disagreeable to his master, and he resolved to exercise his wit and discernment for his advantage.

CHAP-

CHAPTER XIII.
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KING Stephen, with the good help of his bold barons, and his foreign allies, speedily subdued and silenced the refractory in Normandy, and made peace with the king of France.

In the various battles in which they had been necessarily engaged, sir Roland had distinguished himself as a hero, and the emulative sir William no less so; for in the thickest of the *mêlée*, or foremost in the most perilous charges, were the two young knights always to be found, combatting side by side for fame.

When the peace succeeding these wars arrived, Hubert de Lacy discovered that he was farther than ever removed from the consummation of his wishes; sir Roland grew more and more in favour, and  
was

was even admitted to the king's councils, wherefrom, ere this, sir William was excluded, and only now admitted (as De Lacy justly divined) in courtesy to the father, who might have felt the extreme partiality of the measure, if it had not been equally extended to both the knights; besides that, the king himself, delighted to see the two brave youths united in every thing.

It chanced upon a day, that the knights were engaged in martial exercises, on a large plain before the castle which the king occupied. Stephen was not pleased to join in the sports as he was wont, and therefore became a spectator, with several of his barons, of the prowesses of the younger knights.

In the tilting and jousting, sir William and sir Roland appeared pre-eminent, and at every fortunate turn, received the flattering plaudits of their sovereign. They were surprised, however, in the midst of their disports and pastime, by the sudden  
appearance



appearance of a most elegant and fair-favoured squire, who entered the spacious circle wherein the knights were displaying their skill in arms, on a beautiful grey palfrey, with costly housings of white leather, glittering with silver *fleurs-de-lys*. The squire himself was habited in a white suit, likewise guarded or bordered with the *fleur-de-lys* embroidered in silver. His long hair, approaching the pure and dazzling white of his habit in colour, hung about his shoulders, fantastically divided, and tied with silver cords, forming twenty long, thin, narrow tails! His small well-trimmed mustachios—his eyebrows and his lashes, were also white, which rather advantageously set off the clear and roseate hue of his complexion.

The sudden appearance of this phenomenon suspended their sports. Ralphe, who was standing beside sir Roland, tightening the girth of his saddle, and putting the trappings which had been disarranged in the jousting, in order, looked round  
with

with a stare of genuine wonder.—“ Hey-day !” quoth he, “ here’s a lily of a squire ! A man of snow ! A fine figure for a sunshiny day ! I marvel whether grief or moonshine hath bleached his whiskers ? I never beheld a white grimalkin that had not red eyes, and doubtless this blanch squire is blessed with a brace of rubies, shining like sparks beneath the embers of those ashy brows !”

“ He is a trim squire,” said sir Roland, addressing sir William de Lacy ; “ I wonder what he brings ?”

“ Peradventure some message to his grace ; see, he marks the king, and rides towards him,” said sir William.

“ Ride me forward too, and let us list to his speech,” continued sir Roland. “ If it be as particular as his appearance, we shall, I ween, draw much entertainment therefrom.”

“ Onward then,” cried sir William ; and they were presently near enough the king to hear the words of the white squire,  
who,

who, doffing his white cap and plume, and affectedly shaking back his twenty tails, which fell forward, he made a respectful obeisance to Stephen and his nobles, at the same time managing his palfrey so admirably, that the beautiful little animal stood on its hind-legs, as the squire drew off his cap; and as he inclined his body, so did the palfrey bend its gracefully-arched neck, till the form of the head was entirely lost in the fullness of the flowing mane.

“ Renowned and mighty king !” said the squire, in a bold, distinct, and impressive voice, “ in the name, and by command of the invincible and fearless Aquinarde le Noir, surnamed the Giant, whom it is my happy lot to serve, I humbly greet your grace with the office of his lance or glaive in thine honourable service. Approaching with all due homage and respect to England’s king, he bids me cast these gauntlets to his knights, that he may prove, by force of arms, his  
just

just right to the proud title of ‘Invincible!’ which he hath won by his prowess displayed throughout the wide kingdom of martial France! In the presence of your prince, hear ye, oh! valiant knights, who fight beneath his banner! these gauntlets twain are thrown in defiance to any *two* cavaliers who shall have the courage to oppose their united strength to Aquinarde le Noir! So speaks the all-conquering and never vanquished knight, by the mouth of his humble and much-honoured squire!” Having concluded this bombastic defiance, the white squire sat silent and motionless as a statue of sculptured marble, awaiting the response of Stephen.

“Who can this same Aquinarde le Noir—this giant be, who approacheth us heralded by this strange squire, with as strange a speech?” said Stephen to Hubert de Lacy.

“Think your grace we can do otherwise than accept his challenge,” said De Lacy,

Lacy, "whosoever or whatsoever he may be?"

"It must be so," replied the king, "and with God's will we'll teach him we have knights can wield a glaive, or poise a lance, with any he in Christendom!" and then raising his voice, indignant at the slight estimation in which the French knight, by his bravado, seemed to hold his sturdy warriors, he exclaimed aloud to all those who had eagerly gathered around—"What, ho! ye sirs!—Lo! yon prankful squire comes pricking hither on his worshipful master's errand, who singly defies any twain among ye! If there be a brave couple who have courage enow to encounter this stranger knight, stand ye forth presently, and take up his gage!"

At this harangue, every knight pressed forward to offer his services, all to a man feeling equally moved by indignation, with their valiant prince, at the audacity of Aquinarde le Noir.

None were more urgent than sir Roland  
and

and sir William for the commands of the king to be conferred upon, both willing to essay their skill in the contest, and chastise the vaunter.

Hubert de Lacy appeared pleased with the warmth which was so eagerly manifested by all, and turning to Stephen—“ May it please your grace,” said he, “ methinks no one better deserves the honour of this occasion, than our favourite sir Roland!—to him, I pray your grace, be this task awarded !”

Sir Roland bowed gratefully to De Lacy, for this interference in his behalf; and he felt the greatness of the favour the more, when he reflected that had the baron been less disinterested and impartial, he would have sued the honour for his own son. Again, he thought, he had cause to learn how much his honest squire had erred in attributing anything inimical or selfish to the conduct of De Lacy.

Sir William approached his father, and apparently offered some remonstrance to  
his



his wishes, in a low unintelligible whisper ; but he only received a sharp, laconic reproof, accompanied by a frowning, expressive look, which commanded his silence. —“ Thou art chosen,” replied the king ; “ and to thee be left the free choice of thy companion in this exploit !”

Sir Roland, delighted, bowed, and instantly snatching up the gauntlets, drew them both on his own hands.—“ Go tell the proud knight who sent thee hither,” said sir Roland, holding out his hands, and displaying the gauntlets, “ there are no two knights in the king of England’s service who dare fight him—for they fear to compromise their prince’s honour, and their own, by an unequal combat. Although the mode of two to one may be most familiar to Aquinarde le Noir, as with many of his compatriots, the king of England’s knights neither understand nor practise it !”

A murmur of applause arose among the young knight’s auditors, and he continued :—

tinued :—" Go hence, and quickly tell Aquinarde le Noir, that one of the youngest, and least worthy of the royal Stephen's knights, has the presumption to stand forth against his invincibility."

The white squire bowed, and wheeling round his grey palfrey, raised the silver bugle which was suspended by his side, and blew a long, loud, but musical note, which sounded above the plaudits of the king and his nobles.

An unbroken silence ensued, for curiosity was strongly awakened in every breast, when the clattering of a horse's hoofs, not far distant, answered to the winding of the squire's bugle; and in an instant the guards who formed the circle gave way, and in galloped the formidable Aquinarde le Noir!

The surname of the "Giant" was by no means an inappropriate title, for the stature of the French knight was of a most uncommon altitude. But his stalwart and muscular figure was not more prodigious

digious than his swarthy features were repulsive. His visage was of the most sombre complexion, rendered more ferocious by an enormous curly beard, and overshadowed by huge beetling brows, from beneath which his dark piercing eyes glanced with a fierce sinister expression, giving him altogether a most forbidding aspect. The tall iron-grey steed he bestrode was well matched in its proportions with the gigantic rider.

The mail of Aquinarde le Noir was black, sprinkled with silver fleurs-de-lys, of an unpolished dead white. His bacinet, or helmet, was smooth bright steel, of a conical form, admirably calculated to ward off the stroke of glaive or faulchion; and from the pinnacle of this cone a cluster of blood-red ostrich feathers stood erect. On his left arm was braced a broad buckler, of large circumference, with his device of the fleur-de-lys, surmounted by the word "invincible." In his right hand he

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grasped

grasped a ponderous battle-axe, reversed, resting on his right thigh.

The eyes of all measured him, as he galloped forward, armed with all the formidable appearance that nature had bestowed, or art could give.

“ By God’s birth !” cried Stephen, “ but the knight is bigger than his words, the which is marvellous ! We tremble for our favourite. His haste hath brought him into peril. But he hath taken up the gages, and now must needs brave the consequences of his rashness.”

“ He may vanquish,” said Hubert de Lacy, inwardly exulting in the improbability of such an issue, “ and the winning will be worth the risk !”

Sir William de Lacy regarded his father with a look of suspicion and silent reprobation. He was convinced, by the baron’s manner, that he was the secret mover in this plot, for the destruction of his friend and preserver.

But while the king and his nobles were  
conversing



hath in his whole carcase, yet would I fain see thee encounter a foe on more equal terms!"

"Hold thy peace, Ralphe," said the confident sir Roland, in nowise daunted by the mystery and display made by Aquinarde le Noir; "the more danger, the more honour."

"Heaven, and thy chaste mistress's prayers, be with thee!" fervently ejaculated Ralphe. "An' this giant kill thee, I vow by the holy St. Erkenwald, he shall eat me or my sword, albeit I am no better than a simple squire! Thine enemies shall not see thee fall unrevenged. There is exultation in that smirking old baron's eyes! By the Lord! were it not treasonable, I would call him knave!"

"Tush!" cried sir Roland, impatient even of the short delay his own necessary preparations occasioned. "Pull this brace tighter; I like not my buckler dangling loose upon mine arm, like a lady's flower-basket."

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The squire quickly did his bidding; and—"Ready!" cried the knight; then spurring his horse, rode round the circle, to be well assured that all his arms and his horse's trappings were in order.

CHAPTER XIV.  
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“WELL, sir knight!” said Aquinarde, now first speaking, in a loud, stentorian voice, “how like ye my bearing?—hath thy scrutiny marked any vincible point? If thy bravery be but equal to thy caution, in verity Aquinarde le Noir must yield to the English knight.”

This was pronounced in a taunting and sneering humour; but sir Roland smiled with contempt at his conceited raillery; and having at a glance reconnoitred his enemy, he addressed him, while Stephen and all present listened with breathless attention. De Lacy evinced much anxiety; for the heralds still waited the king’s command to sound the charge.

“Sir Aquinarde le Noir!” said the knight, “by the law of arms, I demand
the

the choice of weapons; it is the right of the challenged, and not the challenger."

"Hah!" cried De Lacy, "he wavers!"

"Wavers!" repeated the king hastily, if not angrily; "sir Roland knoweth no fear. De Lacy, there is not a knight in this wide field dare singly beard that giant as this dauntless youth hath done! His demand is just—let it be conceded."

Hereupon Hubert de Lacy addressed the invincible, who immediately consented to what sir Roland had an undoubted right to demand, although it was evidently unexpected that he would have made the demand.—"Or axe, glaive, mace, or guisarme," replied Aquinarde, proudly, "I am willing: let the knight choose his own weapons, and his own death."

A pair of long two-edged swords were consequently presented by sir Roland's squire for the choice of Aquinarde le Noir, who having made his selection, returned the other to Ralphe.

These preliminaries being adjusted, the king kept his eyes upon sir Roland, expecting he would make the sign for sounding the charge; but Stephen, as well as all the beholders, were astonished when they beheld his squire again despatched with another brace of swords, of the same dimensions as the former.

“What means this?” demanded Aquinarde, fiercely, irritated at the delay occasion by these preparations: “doth thy master intend to play with me?”

“Nay, trust me, sir knight, thou’lt find him in earnest!” retorted Ralphe: “he’ll prove no playmate.”

“What means this then?” said the giant: “have I not chosen my weapon already?”

“Ay, truly,” replied Ralphe: “but having in the glory of thy invincibility challenged two knights, and sir Roland, my right valiant master, having fearlessly stepped into the shoes, or the rather, the gauntlets of the twain challenged, likewise
intends •

intends to bear their two glaives, and (this being his bold intention) hath thereupon courteously sent thee a brace of blades too, as he never strikes but upon equal terms!"

Aquinarde bit his lips with rage, and inwardly vowed the bitterest vengeance against his cool, tantalizing antagonist, who having fastened the bridle of his steed to his stirrups, that he might have both arms at liberty, gave the signal, and the trumpets sounded. The two knights spurred on their steeds at the same moment; but just as they approached, and were almost within arm's length of each other, sir Roland suddenly turned his horse, and passed on the left in lieu of the right side of his opponent, while Aquinarde, not being used to wield the sword in his left hand, attempted in vain to make an effective blow. On the contrary, sir Roland, being ambidexter, fighting as well with the left as the right, as he rode by, struck away the red plume of his antagonist

tagonist with a well-directed back stroke. Again they wheeled and charged. Fury flashed from the dark eyes of the giant, as he pressed on the youthful, but dauntless, sir Roland, whose countenance was stern, and his lips compressed with bold determination, while his eyes were vigilantly fixed on the dark visage of Le Noir, observant of every motion.

The mighty blows of Aquinarde rang upon his mail, and struck fire from the defensive guard of sir Roland, who parried alternately with one hand and cut with the other, to the great discomfiture of the invincible knight of France, whose left-handed sword was obviously not only useless, but the possession of it troublesome and inconvenient, and considerably shackled him in his motions.

In the wielding of the battleaxe, his ordinary weapon, Aquinarde was indeed invincible; for height and might gave him a decided superiority over every knight who had the audacity to confront him. To
come

come within the furious and irresistible range of his ponderous axe, was certain destruction; no arm nor mail had strength to oppose it: but in the use of the sword there required more skill than strength. Sir Roland had foreseen this, and was conscious that only in the knight's acquiescence in his rightful demand could there exist the slightest chance in his favour; and he soon became aware of the manner of the knight's defence, and his inferior skill, and consequently grew more emboldened at every stroke, frustrating every movement of Aquinarde's, who vainly manœuvred to bring him to fight on the right side, and kept continually pressing on his left, thereby confusing the giant, who felt how unequal were his fencible tactics to the task of opposing sir Roland's sinister offence.

The blows of Aquinarde had fallen several times, but ineffectually, on the stout mail of his antagonist, for they were either from his left sword, or being aimed

across by his right, fell nearly short, and always harmless. Sir Roland had however already wounded him severely in the left thigh, from whence the blood flowed profusely.

Loud and deafening were the shouts of the knights, and ever and anon the martial notes of the heralds' trumpets braced the nerves of the combatants, and inspired them with new vigour.

Already they appeared at least upon equal terms, when by a sudden and desperate movement, Aquinarde succeeded in bringing sir Roland on his right, and his unwearying hand showered down quick and heavy strokes upon the young knight's helm and pouldrons ; his left-handed sword was his only shield, for they had both cast aside their bucklers in assuming the two swords. Sir Roland's attempts to regain his former favourable position were fruitless, and his strength appeared fast failing beneath the weight of the giant's vigorous and unremitting strokes.

Aquinarde

Aquinarde perceived his advantage, and aimed a swinging blow, wherein all his strength seemed concentrated; but the quick eye of sir Roland marked the uplifted threatening glaive, which promised to annihilate him in its fall, and guarding his head with his right arm, and cowering down, he wheeled suddenly round, and dexterously, almost miraculously, avoided the sword, whose sharp point pierced the arched neck of Aquinarde's rearing steed.

The wound was deep—the purple stream gushed forth—the foaming flanks of the noble animal quivered convulsively, and with one desperate plunge he fell headlong on the blood-stained plain, casting his foiled and furious rider some yards before him; and the fearful rattling and clattering of his mail was drowned by the loud huzzas of the spectators, who hailed his downfall with every demonstration of heartfelt delight.

The white squire, with twenty others
of

of the same degree, were presently beside him, offering their aid in raising him; while Ralphe running eagerly to his master, cordially congratulated him on his victory.—“Foregad, your worship,” cried he, “but thou hast trimmed him lustily! Thou hast little now to do in order to finish what thou hast so gloriously begun, though peradventure the big knight may sing small on this occasion, seeing thou hast already laid his high spirit low, bringing the boaster to the level of his own beast, who, by the mass, was by far better favoured than his master, for he had a longer head; albeit, when they have raised the knight’s carcase, he will doubtless exhibit as long a face as his horse’s; for I dare be sworn he is as cleverly shaken as a bourse o’ marks in a saddle-bag, after a day’s hard trotting.”

The king, De Lacy, and sir William, also rode up to sir Roland.—“By my halidom,” cried Stephen, “bravely done, my gallant youth! Our thanks be thine;
and

and so must all our knights of merry England thank thee too, as the renowned champion of their honour, for plucking down this vain boaster. Retire from the field—victory is awarded thee.”

Sir Roland bowed, and Ralphe grasped the bridle of his steed to lead him away, when De Lacy, with seeming deference to the king, ventured to interpose.—“I pray your grace, for the honour of England,” said he, earnestly, “let not sir Roland quit the field before the verbal concession of Aquinarde le Noir shall yield him the palm of victory. Give him every fair chance, that hereafter he may not have sufficient cause to aver that an accident, and not the skill and courage of his indomptable adversary, vanquished him. I stand forth, as your grace is well assured, not as his advocate, but sir Roland’s true and honest friend. In the conquest of a foreign, and such a foe, let not the least punctilious point be overstepped or disregarded,

garded, whereon the invidious tongue of our enemies may rest complaint."

"Well—be it so," replied the king. "If he can mount again, and hath the obstinacy to continue the combat, a' God's name let him have his will and his just meed: we will not oppose even our right 'twixt him and his desire, although we still hold him as a conquered knight."

While this conversation was carried on, the squires had succeeded in placing the discomfited knight on his legs. A pallid deathlike hue, caused by fatigue and loss of blood, overspread his demoniac countenance. He glared horribly on those around him, and in a hoarse and broken voice, bade the white squire bring him another horse.

His request was quickly obeyed, and he again mounted.

"Cast down but not vanquished," cried he, flourishing his sword, and regarding sir Roland with a menacing look; "the mountain

mountain pine may be bended, and yet not be broken."

"The arm that can bend may break it too," replied sir Roland; "but swords, and not words, sir Aquinarde, are to decide the contest."

"On then," exclaimed he, "and I will prove how sharply my steel can speak to thy soul."

The circle was quickly cleared, and the heralds again sounded their trumpets for the charge. Death or victory seemed the tacit, yet mutual resolve of both combatants. The combat was marked with more desperation, and less caution than before. Each appeared bent on the speedy destruction of his antagonist, and doubtful for a long time was the issue. Now one, now the other, alternately gained and lost the advantage. Aquinarde seemed to regain his lost vigour, in proportion as the less robust frame of sir Roland sunk under the severity of excessive fatigue and superior weight. He almost imperceptibly receded
before

before the strong, indefatigable arm of the giant, who became more and more encouraged, as he felt the failing strength of his retreating opponent. He pressed hard upon him; and beating down his guard, struck his sword from his right hand; but in blindly pursuing his advantage, received the sharp point of sir Roland's left sword in his throat, just above his brazen haller-cet. Instantly his two useless swords dropped from his nerveless grasp; his head fell upon his breast—his beard, dyed in the blood which gurgled from his death-wound; and he rolled from his horse a lifeless and unwieldy corpse. Loud huzzas rent the air, and proclaimed sir Roland's glorious victory.

The white squire ran in dismay to his master; but the once-invincible Aquinarde le Noir had fought to the death, and yielded life and victory to the skilful and more fortunate arm of the dauntless sir Roland.

Ralphe, who had watched with the deepest

deepest interest and most heartfelt solicitude the various chances of the conflict, now leaped with unbounded joy, at its favourable termination for his honoured master; while the knight's extraordinary exertions had so completely exhausted his spirits and his strength, that he needed every kindly aid to restore him; and he was led away from the field scarcely finding speech sufficient to return his laconic thanks for the hearty congratulations of his friends.

But not even sir William participated in the bitter feelings of chagrin and disappointment which filled the heart of Hubert de Lacy; he stood alone, a prey to discontent and resentment, surrounded by joy, and happiness, and exultation, like some withered and stricken tree in the midst of a smiling and flower-enamelled mead; his mind and invention, ever directed to one grand point—one soul-engrossing object—the destruction of sir Roland, in which he had always fortunately

tunately been foiled whenever he had enjoyed an opportunity of attempting it; and moreover, in aggravation of his disappointment, he was aware, in the failure of every deep-laid scheme, that he had only enhanced the glory, or increased the fortunes of sir Roland.

During their campaigns in Normandy, he had heard of the redoubtable Aquinarde le Noir; and the wonders related of his incredible feats, his gigantic stature, and his invincibility, raised his curiosity, and he was resolved privately to seek an interview with him. Finding that fame had by no means exaggerated his enormous height, and easily believing that his might was no less inferior than report had widely bruited it abroad, he was presently induced to engage him in the execution of his designs against sir Roland; and notwithstanding his exploits and his perilous adventures, the giant was a needy man, and readily assented, upon the promise of a considerable sum of money, to appear on
a certain

a certain day, and arouse the courage of sir Roland, by the mystery and vaunting manner of his challenge, and urge him to an encounter wherein certain death awaited him. Every particular being properly arranged, and the time appointed, the formidable knight approached to conquer and destroy, and was, as we have already recounted, completely foiled.

Whatever natural strength and courage sir Roland was possessed of, it would have been impossible to have encountered Aquinarde with the slightest chance of success, had he not happily bethought him of, and demanded his right of the choice of the weapons, in the use whereof he was so admirably skilled.

Upon Aquinarde's first appearance, sir William was conscious that his father was concerned, and was astonished that he had not been made acquainted with his vile intentions. But Hubert de Lacy had of late observed how changed were the sentiments of his son towards his companion.

nion. However interest or ambition might influence him, he found there existed a stronger feeling of gratitude, which rose superior to any baser thought of worldly advancement, or kingly favour; and he had therefore considered it both wise and cautious to keep his plot a secret, lest sir William, in his predilection for sir Roland, might, by some word or look, disclose it, and put him on his guard, and thereby cause an investigation, which might be of the direst consequence to the baron's fair name.

CHAPTER XV.
////////

“ HOLY Virgin ! when will these fearful troubles, these outbreakings of the evil spirit of the people, be subdued ? Poor England ! torn by intestine commotions, hath enjoyed but a short repose ; her wounds are scarcely healed up, when they are again threatened to be more severely probed ; and lo ! they will be bleeding afresh, ripped open by the parricidal hands of her own children ! Have not the people been sufficiently scourged for their sins and their offences ? Blind, misguided, unfortunate nation ! ”

Such were the words and the apostrophe of the honest friar, whom we have before introduced to our readers at the hostelry in London, and in the field before Exeter, where he was charitably employed in healing

ing the sick, or giving ghostly consolation to the dying; and even in the same double capacity of leech and priest, he was now permitted to accompany the expedition to Normandy.

Although war was his abhorrence, and the fighting of brother against brother, a grievous sight to his eyes, yet over the field of battle he was sure ever to be seen hovering, bringing comfort to all; for of all places, he would argue, wherein the devil most delights to haunt, the camp is the most abundant in his disciples; vice and debauchery bear there unlicensed sway; and there, even in his stronghold, let the pious monk and the holy friar resort, that he may chase away Satan, and destroy the crafty nets he so industriously spreads for the destruction of the souls of mankind. Such were the sentiments of the friar; and his practice shamed not the austerity of his devotions, or the fervency and truth of his oft-repeated prayers.

“Holy St. Francis!” exclaimed Ralphe,
who

who overheard his lugubrious lamentation, "what dark cloud of woe hath suddenly bursten over thy reverend head, that thy tongue echoes its thunders so dolefully? or hast thou been at the opening of a budget, and stolen away with the hard morsels of indigestible intelligence, leaving behind thee the fatter parts, whereon there was somewhat palatable to a news-devouring appetite? Say, holy father, hast thou sought honey and brought away wasps?"

"Alack! my son, the cursed breath of dissension hath again illumed the torch of war, so late extinguished in our native land!" answered the friar, and was about to proceed on his way, when Ralphe's inquiries arrested his steps.

"What more?" demanded the squire.

"What more!" echoed the friar, mournfully turning up his eyes—"what would ye more?—what can be worse than the horrors of a civil war?" and again he turned away, and left Ralphe pondering.

“A civil war!” said he, soliloquizing, “of all things the most uncivil, I take it, and monstrously miscalled; ’twere as reasonable to call a wild boar a gallant. Civil wars indeed! egad! some one of the barons having grown uncomfortably large in worldly possessions, wishes to loll his unwieldy carcase on the mere footstool and couch of some petty brother baron! But it is the curse of abundance to be uneasy and petulant; luxury destroys more than it enjoys.”

At this moment a hearty slap on the shoulder startled Ralphe from his reverie, and looking round, he beheld his Flemish friend, Gerrit Oosterwyk.—“Hah! hah! mine coot vriend, hoe vaart u?—hoe vare you, yonker man?” cried the man of war, shewing his white teeth, as his hairy lip curled up in a silent laugh.

“Friend Oysterwake,” said Ralphe, rubbing his broad shoulders, which tingled with the effects of the application of the Fleming’s hard hand, “when thou comest
near

near a horse, never approach, and lay thine hand on him, without whistling or coaxing, lest he kick thee."

"Drew! drew! dat is coot! zeer coot!"

"And, mark me, if thou treatest an ass in the same manner, he will not be offended; treat a knave like a knight, he'll behave more polite; an a gift glove fit not the right hand, it may be forced on the left—thou takest me!"

"Dake you?"

"Thou understandest me?"

"Oh! yaw—onderstand! yaw—yaw. Ik verstaan."

"That's perfectly right, as is all that is left of me, thanks to thine inquiries: and henceforth depend on't, when I lack assistance, I'll call upon thee to lend me a hand, seeing Heaven hath blessed thee with a marvellous capacious one—broad enough for the accomodation of a dozen friends! Verily, 'tis a pity such a glorious *palm* should be dedicated to the services of war; it were honest enough to become a *palm*

of peace. Talking of peace puts me in mind of the tidings thy coming drove out of my nonce so unceremoniously."

"Dydings?"

"Ay, of another war."

"Anoder war?" repeated he, his eyes glistening with delight at the prospect of such an occurrence; "vaar—vaar is het, mine yonker vriend?"

"In England!" replied Ralphe.

"In Engellond?" in a tone of surprise; "vhy duizend duyvelen! vat is de madder mit de volk?"

"Heaven only knows!" said Ralphe; "but while there is life, there is strife. Let the priests say what they will, war appears a natural ingredient in the composition of mankind. An we were all like lambs in a pasture, nibbling blades of grass in lieu of wielding blades of steel, what would become of us? Such a state may do very well for *ruminating* animals, but not for rational ones. A little war now and then is physic to the constitution,

tion, and a wholesome purgation to the many evils which creep in during the fat intervals of peace!"

"Bote, mine coot yonker man," said Oosterwyk, who was rather impatient at Ralphe's moralizing, which his very imperfect knowledge of the language in which it was uttered, rendered it almost unintelligible, "vat zay dey of dis var? Zal de coot king vight mit 'em?"

"In good earnest, honest Oysterwake, I have but the tip of the tail, as it were, of the tidings—for the body of the information we must e'en seek farther. I can make a guess though, and strike within a nail's breadth of the bull's eye of certainty too, I could wage my staff and bonnet."

"Vat dink you?"

"Why, peradventure some doughty baron, in whose hand the king hath put a staff, is moved by a rebellious spirit, and wisheth to raise it against the royal donor. None of the barons like the king, and would willingly level their lord and mas-

ter, if they were able. In truth, they love nothing that sounds mightier than baron, and fain would have every thing *barren*, but their own lands and their ladies!—or may be, that spit-fire—that malleolus—that combustible shaft, the émpress Maude, hath threatened the kingdom with a broil. She who hath not reason enough to govern her own shrewish temper, would temporize with the discontented barons, in order to raise herself to the throne. A God's name, if this weaker vessel—ycleped a woman—getteth to be made the great pan of the dairy, the kingdom will speedily go to pot! No Maude, nor maudlings, say I—of all governments, a petticoat government is the most absurd and tyrannical. A distaff is far more seemly in the hands of a dame, than a sceptre. The one she uses—the other abuses. Heaven bless her—with disappointment, for the sake of her own soul, and all the poor souls in merry England.”

In

In the latter supposition, the honest squire was perfectly correct; for the news which was brought express from England, soon spread, and became generally known throughout the castle.

During Stephen's temporary absence, the barons had considered it a fair opportunity to rebel against the king's power, and (as some were pleased to call it, to gloss over their own disloyal and iniquitous defection) his usurpation; and conspiring together, sent for Maude, promising to put her speedily in possession of the realm, and all her lawful rights, according to the solemn oath tendered her in the lifetime of Henry, by that prince's desire.

In taking this step, however, the barons cared little for the service or aggrandizement of the empress, only contemplating the augmentation of their own power, by the agency of such a woman, whom they flattered themselves would become a docile tool in their cunning hands.

When the messenger who brought the tidings quitted England, Maude had not then arrived, but the rumour of her coming was publicly abroad; and the bishop of Winchester (the king's brother) having advised with his staunch friends, deemed it proper to give him early notice of his enemies' intentions, that he might return, and, by the valour of his arm, and the encouragement of his presence, rally about him his liege subjects, and subdue that feud in its infancy, which, in delay or neglect, might wax to an overweening strength.

Bedford, and divers other strong places, had already openly renounced their allegiance to the king; as also had Robert, earl of Gloucester, Maude's brother, fortifying Bristow and other castles.

The tidings of these great troubles was most unwelcome to the ears of Stephen, who was pursuing a glorious course of victory in Normandy, and he was deeply chagrined that such an urgent necessity should

should compel him to leave the business which had caused him to undertake the expedition still unfinished, or at least, comparatively incomplete with his desire; for many, however insignificant, still vexatiously held out against him, though he had subdued the most formidable part. Without delay, therefore, the king's commands were issued for the embarkation of his forces, in order to return to England.

Sir Roland, who had never ceased to think of the fair Myriol, or to offer up his prayers for the welfare of the lady of his affections, was delighted at the prospect of a speedy return. The thought of beholding her again, to learn from her lips that he still held the esteem of such a beautiful creature, was transport to his soul, although the occasion which recalled them so unexpectedly was lamentable to his and every patriotic heart.

De Lacy, who still only regarded him as the king's favourite knight, and an obstacle

stacle in the way of his ambitious march, although he was aware that Stephen only treated him with the same partiality that he showed towards himself and favoured son—but the haughty baron could not brook participation in the favour of his prince with such a knight of fortune as sir Roland, whatever the qualities of his heart or his intrinsic virtues might deserve—"My son," said he, discoursing with sir William in the privacy of his own chamber, on the same evening of the herald's arrival from England, "for thou art my son, and I would have thee so prove thyself, by acting unerringly in obedience to every wish of my heart—as thou art of my blood, so should'st thou feel as acutely every passion that moves my soul, and be prompt to execute my minutest wishes; and the rather anticipate them, than throw out any obstruction in the way of their fulfilment, when they are spoken—we are now about to return to England, and the same scorpion
that

that stood in our way hither still promises to haunt us in our path."

Sir William de Lacy met his father's meaning look with confusion; for the space of a minute they both remained silent.—"My lord," said sir William, at last breaking the unpleasant silence, "if I dare pronounce my sentiments, I would tell thee——"

"I have lost that son for whom my whole life hath been devoted to serve. I see it all. Hold thy peace, or bring down my curse upon thy head!" angrily interrupted De Lacy, while his eyes kindled with irrepressible rage; "the knave hath won upon thy weakness, and enslaved thy mind by some accursed art of sorcery. Yea, he must perforce bear some powerful charm about his person, or he would never have eluded every springe I have set to catch him, or escaped, like the salamander, unscorched from the fierce fire of my vengeance, which hath flamed with unabated fury continually around him. What human
man

man hand unaided could oppose the mighty strength of such a giant as Aquinarde le Noir? And did he not vanquish him? What arm, not gifted by supernatural power, could have battled with the mountain-billows so fearlessly and so unwearily as his? Some evil spirit gifts him with prowess to our undoing."

"Reflect, my lord. Think'st thou that in preserving me from a watery grave, he was impelled by aught but good? An enemy would have seen me engulfed in the fathomless sea, and rejoiced; while he dauntlessly, and at the imminent risk of his own life, plunged into the frightful waves, and rescued me. Doth not that single action gloss over a thousand faults? and at least deserves our forbearance, if it doth not command our gratitude."

"Fool! Dost thou become the trumpeter of thy foe, and proclaim his virtues to the world? Go to. Thou art no son of mine. Ambition hath given place to gratitude!

gratitude! Pshaw! unlearn this foolery—leave gratitude to hinds. It is a weak sentiment, that appears not in the vocabulary of a true courtier. Must we be grateful that this upstart knight hath come to divide our fortune with us, to rob us of our right and participate in our glory? We were as towering mountains ere this phenomenon appeared, and now we lay as lowly valleys beneath his sudden greatness. Is this to be borne? If thy grovelling spirit can bear with this, go bend thy pliant, unambitious neck, and bid him set his foot upon it, that he may rise by thy prostration, and tell the wondering world that this is gratitude; and thou wilt learn, by their contemptuous sneers, how much they value it.”

“What would'st thou have me do?” said sir William, stung to the soul by the unfeeling sarcasm of the heartless baron.

“Nothing!” emphatically replied De Lacy, “for thy doing will but undo what
I would

I would do securely. Avoid all intercourse with sir Roland, for thou may'st bid adieu to him and gratitude. England's foes must be chastised without the aid of his valorous arm!"

END OF VOL. II.

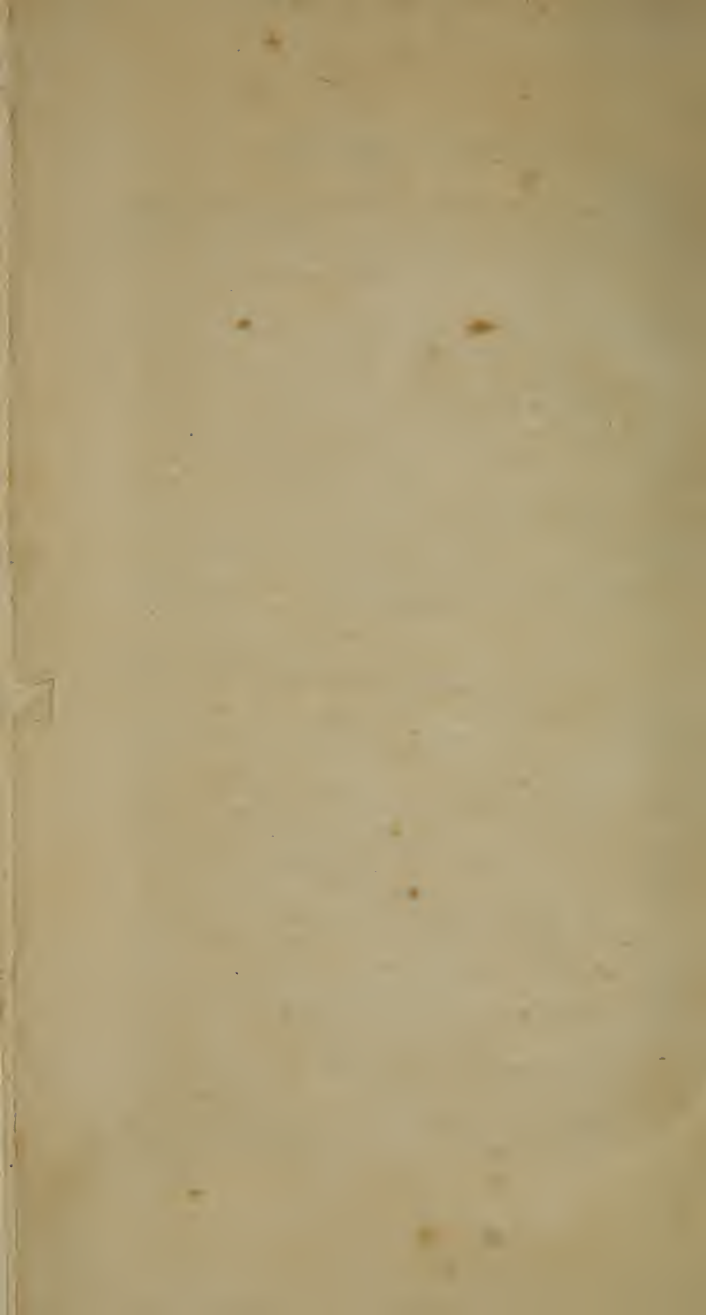
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